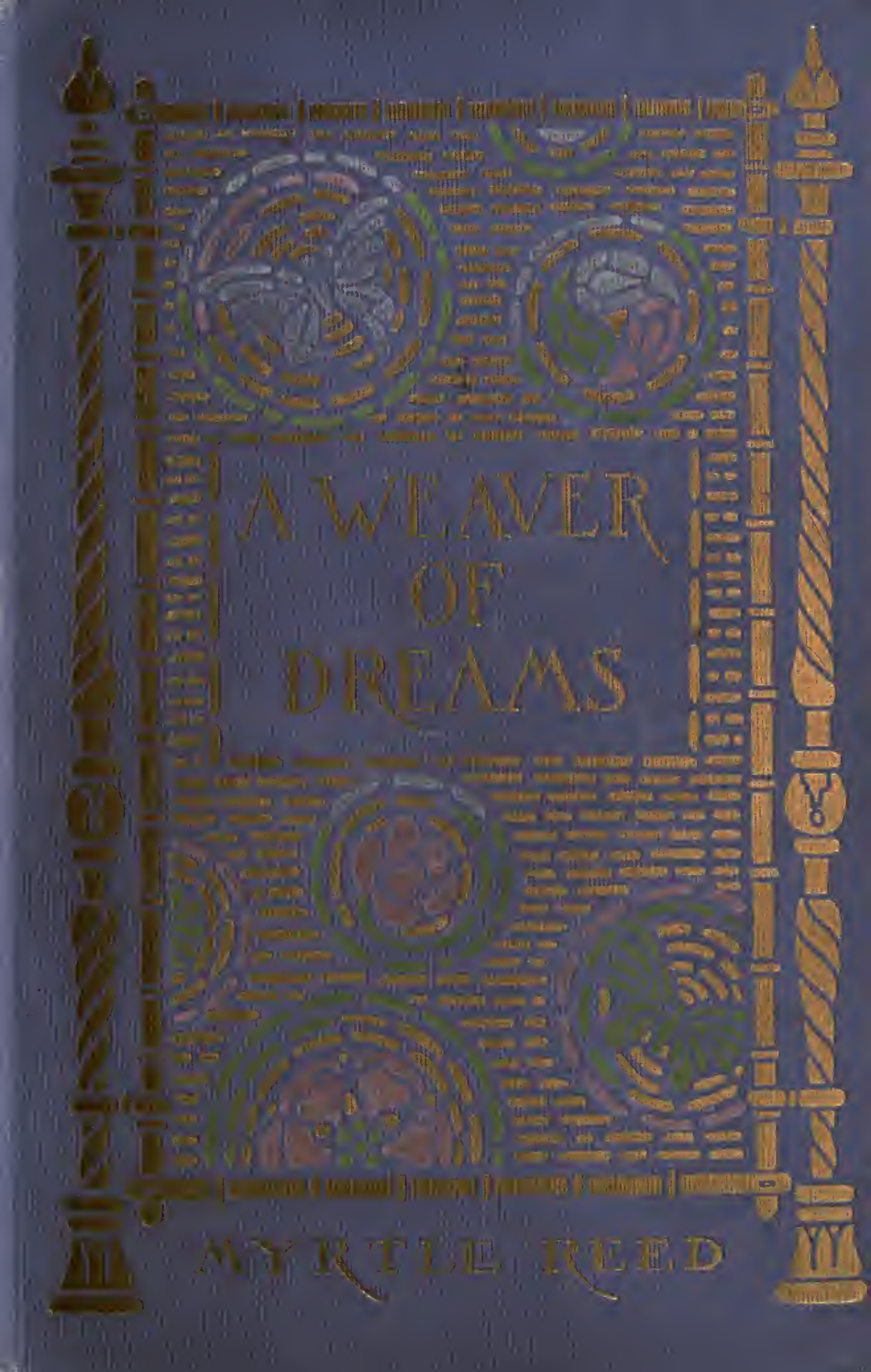
A WEAVER OF DREAMS
MYRTLE REED

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A WEAVER OF DREAMS

W. J. Leaud

A WEAVER OF DREAMS

By MYRTLE REED

"When the road paused at the willows, a girl stopped too. She was warm, breathless, and impatient of her burden. Under one arm was a fat, wriggling puppy, and in that same hand she tried to hold a white linen parasol over her head; the other arm clasped a loaf of bread which kept slipping out of the paper, and in the other hand was what remained of a blue pitcher full of cream."

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press
1911

Drawn by A. G. Learned.

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A Weaver of Dreams

I

Rose-Leaves

THE road was hot and dusty, but, nevertheless, it allured. Beginning in the hopeless ugliness of a small town's main street, it turned a corner at the postoffice and wandered forth, lazily, at its own capricious will. It widened for a moment at a group of overhanging willows, as though to rest in the fragrant shade, paused where the little stream crooned in the grass, went beside it for a time, then crossed it upon a wooden bridge, and climbed upward toward the cool green hills.

The Road

In its nature the road was opposed to things that hurried. To the care-free foot of the traveller who had plenty of time, it yielded a gentle acceptance and even gave some sort of sympathetic response. A swift step was annoying. A dog that ran would find himself very thirsty by the time he reached the brook, a horse and cart would stir up definite resentment, and the daring motor car that intruded upon the road with discordant wheezes would be swiftly mantled and choked by revengeful dust.

At the Willows

Turning aside from the general direction of traffic, the road narrowed as it approached solitude. Dust gave way to firm brown earth, and ferns grew thickly upon both sides of it, where, in the Spring, clusters of violets turned eyes of heavenly blue toward shining skies. Wild roses ran riot among the ferns, spending prodigally of their divine incense when the pink-and-white censers swung in the passing breeze. The merest rills of water murmured along the road; children of deep pools in the hills, answering the call of another Pied Piper that eventually would lure them to the sea.

A flock of sheep grazed upon the upland pastures, just below the pines, kept within bounds by a rail fence that straggled half-heartedly across the hill at a perilous slant. A cloud overhung the hill, luminous in the sun —an argosy of silver upon celestial seas of turquoise, cleared for a port unknown.

Where the road paused at the willows, a girl stopped, too. She was warm, breathless, and impatient of her burden. Under one arm was a fat, wriggling puppy, and in that same hand she tried to hold a white linen parasol over her head; the other arm clasped a loaf of bread which kept slipping out of the paper, and in the other hand was what remained of a blue pitcher full of cream.

Spots and streaks down the front of her pink gingham gown bore eloquent testimony as to

A Restless Puppy

what had happened since she left the post-office. The morning mail, tied insecurely into a bundle, dangled from the ribs of her open parasol and occasionally rumpled her hair. Carefully she set down the cream, laid the bread beside it, and, having at last a free hand for the purpose, administered a resounding slap to the puppy.

"You little beast," said Margery, as the open parasol fell into the road. "What do you suppose ever possessed me to take you?"

The puppy whined forgivingly in answer and made a lunge toward the cream. "You shan't," Margery continued, sternly. "You 're not travelling with a dining-car. You 'll wait till we get home—if we ever do."

Hunger and thirst incarnate were struggling helplessly in her strong young arms. "We 'll sit down," she went on, determinedly, "and talk things over a bit. Just because I took you away from a crowd of boys who were abusing you is no sign that I intend to keep you. You 're an abominable little beast, and I don't want you!"

The puppy lifted pained brown eyes to Margery's flushed face, whined, and licked her hand. "I don't doubt you mean well," she said, wiping her hand upon her stained gown, "but you 'll have to behave yourself if you have the faintest desire to live with me. Had n't I enough to carry, with the mail and

Plans Upset

the bread and the cream Eliza wants for to-night's dessert, without taking you home too? I had it all very carefully planned. Parasol in right hand, mail and bread under right arm, pitcher of cream in left hand, skirts to drag in the dust unhindered. And see what you 've done!

"Too foolish to follow, too little to walk very far, even if you wanted to, no rope to lead you with, and possessed by a mad longing for cream! How would you get it, anyway? I 'd have to break the pitcher before I could get you out if you ever got your head into it. I wonder you have n't done it before now. I can't leave you here, because you would n't be here when I got back. I can't leave anything else here, for the same reason, and, besides, it 's too far to come."

A meadow-lark circled through the blue spaces above the road and showered golden notes down upon Margery as he flew. A bumble-bee, his wings dusty with pollen, crossed the road in search of a wild rose with the honey still lying at its heart. A cricket fiddled cheerily in the grass and an impertinent yellow butterfly alighted upon the edge of the cream pitcher.

"Go on," said Margery, resignedly; "get into it if you want to. Do you care for butterflies in your cream, Algernon?" she continued, to the squirming puppy. "I think I 'll name

you Algernon, because I hate it worse 'n any name I know. If I only had a rope, or anything to make a rope of, or a bag, or anything I could make a bag of——

"Might tie you up in my petticoat, I suppose. You 'd tear the lace, and you 'd be uncomfortable, and you 'd howl, but you 'd come, Algernon—oh, yes, you 'd come! Of course it is n't nice for a girl to walk along the highways in broad daylight without a petticoat, but you don't care about that—you don't care about anything but cream. Great goodness, there 's an automobile!"

Scrambling to her feet, Margery rescued her parasol from the path of the approaching monster, took the cream pitcher and the bread, and stepped back behind the willows. The car purred past, in a cloud of dust which choked her and made even Algernon sniff a little.

"Come on," she said, grimly, "we 'll resume our joyous journey." A readjustment made things easier. She closed the parasol, with the mail inside of it, tucked it under her left arm, with the bread, took the cream pitcher in her left hand, and, clasping Algernon firmly with her right arm, started toward home.

But, where the road divided, she hesitated and was lost. She should have taken the path that led along the river-bank, but, like the road itself, she longed for the cool hills.

A World of Joy

A clump of overhanging elder, starry with sweet blossoms, offered a safe hiding-place for whatever she might choose to leave. She stooped, concealed a part of her awkward load, and, with only the parasol and puppy, followed the road that beckoned her upward, where the sheep grazed and the pines breathed spicy fragrances afar.

Youth and the joy of living sang in her blood; the world was as one of the golden apples at Atalanta's feet. Her annoyance was swiftly forgotten in the radiance of a morning that had not yet lost the first freshness, though it was almost noon. The stained gown was no longer among the things that mattered, and the squirming Algernon took on, as by magic, beauty, charm, and desirability.

"You *are* a dear," she whispered, hugging him closer, "and you 're my little doggie for keeps, so you are. I won't give you away, and horrid boys shan't tease you, and you shall have three blue pitchers full of cream every day, and a cushion to sleep on, and perhaps even a little house, all of your own. Want to walk?"

Clumsily, Algernon followed in the wake of the adorable being in pink who had rescued him from the cruel boys and who still smelled deliciously of cream. He continually fell down, but she never stopped to pick him up, even though he whined. It was all he could do to keep pace with the small feet that were

Resting

always just ahead of him, no matter how bravely he strove onward. The white parasol flourished fantastically, striking him in the eye once when he happened to be near.

On they went, up the hill. The road was but the merest path now. Sometimes it lost itself, for a moment, in a group of trees, but always it emerged safely on the other side. A thousand enticing scents of bird and beast came to Algernon as he struggled along the trail, but he dared not stop.

Presently they reached the fence and Margery paused, leaning upon it to rest. Algernon, having the habit of motion firmly fixed upon him, went straight on through the bars until he observed that he had nothing to follow, then he sat down to rest—a very tired little dog with a scarlet tongue hanging out, panting for breath.

"You can walk now," Margery remarked, scornfully, "and follow as though you had been trained to it. Why could n't you have done it when I had my arms full without you? Now that I have only a parasol, you 're ready and willing to walk."

Algernon wagged his tail politely, lay down in the soft grass, and went to sleep.

Far across the valley, the river crept sleepily toward the ultimate sea. It rose in a tiny lake, hidden among the hills, and, before long,

On the Fence

merged itself with another lake, bordered by lily-pads and surrounded by a marsh. Margery could not see the source of the stream, but the deep pool of sapphire, surrounded by misty green, sent gleaming arrows of impalpable silver even up to the pines.

High noon blazed in the zenith; the sheep grazed peacefully upon the hillside. Algernon, with the weariness of the ages upon him, was still sound asleep. She called to him, but he did not answer. Then she leaned through the bars to poke him with her parasol, but he was out of reach.

"Little beast," she said to herself. "I suppose I 'll have to climb the fence!"

She was unused to fences, most of her life having been spent in cities, but she got over, awkwardly enough, gathered up the sleeping puppy, and dumped him unceremoniously upon the proper side of the fence.

"The next thing," she resumed, to herself, "is to get back. I suppose it 's easier to say than it is to do—most things are."

She climbed to the top, jumped—and caught her skirts on the projecting end of the highest rail. Her feet were on the ground, but she was held fast, unable even to turn. Desperately, she tried to wrench herself free, to tear her gown, to climb out of it—anything. But it buttoned down the back, was made of firm and excellent material, and, as far as her

Tedious Waiting

efforts were concerned, she was fastened to the fence permanently.

She laughed, hysterically, then the tears came. It was impossible that she should be hung to a rail fence upon a hill. "Ridiculous!" she breathed. "Absurd! Preposterous!" Her parasol, leaning against the fence, was barely within her reach. She got it, tried to lift her skirts from the rail by poking it back through the bars, and failed. She leaned back against the fence with all her might, but accomplished nothing.

An hour or more passed. She wept, raged vainly against Algernon, who still slept peacefully at her feet, though fortunately beyond her angry reach—and eagerly watched the road below for some sign of life.

No one went by. Down under the elder-bush the bread was drying up and the cream was probably sour. There was no one to look for her or become alarmed about her before dark. Even though she should wave her parasol frantically, anyone who saw it might not interpret it as a signal of distress.

The shadows lengthened. Her feet were numb and her back ached wretchedly. Algernon yawned, stretched himself, and came humbly to Margery, wagging his insignificant tail.

"Don't you dare to speak to me!" she whispered, hoarsely. "You beast, you brute, you

A Gleam of Crimson

animal, you abominable—" She choked back a sob, and Algernon, after the manner of his wild ancestors making beds for themselves in the long grass, turned around several times, yawned capaciously, stretched himself again, and closed his eyes.

Far down upon the road was a gleam of crimson. Margery started forward, her mouth dry and her body trembling. It was—no, it could n't be—yes, it was a parasol! A jaunty red parasol bobbing along serenely on that same dusty road!

Margery screamed—but only succeeded in frightening Algernon. A white gown showed itself below the parasol now. She called again, not a harsh "Help!" full of consonants that refused to carry, but a shrill, sweet "Halloo!" with the final vowel long drawn out.

The parasol hesitated, then stopped. Margery put all her remaining strength into one last cry, then waved her own parasol. The woman below did not move. She waved again but could not call. Algernon, deeply stirred by the adjacent emotion, scampered about madly, and, in trepidation and excitement, produced his first bark.

"Oh," breathed Margery, tremulously, "thank Heaven!"

The red parasol had turned where the road divided and was on its way toward her. Shaking violently, she leaned against the fence and

Free at Last

waited. The woman in white came quickly, with a long, free stride that suggested boyishness subtly transmuted into femininity.

Mist obscured Margery's vision. She looked up, her blue eyes swimming, into a serene and tender face.

"Poor child," said a deep voice, exquisitely modulated. "Lean back as far as you can. I 'll have to help you out of your gown."

The strong white hands were already busy with buttons and hooks. "Now, then—stoop a little, turn this arm, so—now this. Wait a minute. Do you mind if I tear your petticoat? Here—lean on me."

Pale and almost disrobed, but free at last, Margery sank into a pathetic little heap at the foot of the fence. "I did n't have to tear it," the lovely voice was saying. "Let me help you into your clothes again, then you can sit down and rest. How long have you been here?"

"All day, I guess," sobbed Margery. "No, I have n't, either. It must have been about noon."

"It 's only half-past two now," said the older woman, "but it must have seemed ages. Cry, if you want to—it 'll do you good. Put your head on my shoulder, so. I 'm Judith Sylvester. Everyone who wants to cry comes to me to do it."

"I 'm Margery Gordon," returned the

Making Friends

rescued one, with a laugh that was half a sob. "I 've come to spend the summer with Mr. Chandler. He was a friend of my father's."

"Yes," said Judith, softly. "I heard you were coming."

"Father died," continued Margery, choking on the words, "just a month ago. He told me to come here. He said Mr. Chandler would teach me to live."

"He will—he 's taught me."

"I suppose you think it 's queer that I don't wear mourning. Everybody said I was unnatural, and criticised me for it, but I 'd promised Father. He said it was all right for people to feel sorry and to show that they did, but they had no right to inflict their gloom upon other people. And he said he could n't understand why people should take it off at the end of a year or so unless they meant that they were n't sorry any more, and he wanted me to be happy, but not to forget."

"I understand. Are n't you hungry?"

"Yes—I think so. There 's a loaf of bread and a pitcher of cream down under the elder-bush. I left it there when I came up."

"Shall I bring it to you?"

"No, indeed! I 'm all right—only tired, and frightened, and starved."

They went down together, arm in arm, with Algernon, fully rested, but very hungry, following obediently. Margery paused, once

A Wish with Every Petal

in a while, to pick a wild rose, until she had a handful of them, which she thrust into her belt. When they came to the elder-bush, she filled her pink palm from the pitcher, fed the puppy first, then finished the cream herself.

"We 'll remove the stains next," said Judith, practically. She led Margery to the river, dipped her handkerchief into the cold water and scrubbed industriously until the pink gingham was clean again. Margery bathed her tear-stained face, smoothed her rumpled locks, and sat down upon the grassy bank in the sun to dry her gown. Judith sat near her, in the shade of a drooping willow that now and then dropped tiny leaves upon the surface of the stream, to go, with the current, into the lake below.

Judith took a red rose out of her dark hair, and, one by one, cast the petals upon the water. A wistful smile hovered about the corners of her mouth; the velvety depths of her eyes were alight with mystery.

"Why?" asked Margery, curiously.

"To summon the Prince, of course," laughed Judith. "Don't you remember the old fairy tale? Send yours downstream, too—a wish with every petal."

"The same wish?"

"Yes, if you like. I have only one."

Margery took the wild roses from her belt, and, one at a time, scattered the petals upon

Waiting for the Prince

the water. Slowly they drifted out of sight. "I don't see the Prince," she observed, after a pause.

"Give him time. The days of magic are not over yet."

Long shadows lay upon the valley and the silver ripples deepened into gold. "He 's late," said Margery, restlessly, "and I 'll have to get more cream and a fresh loaf of bread before I can go home."

"Are n't you too tired? Shan't I go?"

"No, but I do wish you 'd keep Algernon—until to-morrow."

"Keep—whom?"

"The puppy. I can't get him home with a parasol and the other things I have to carry. Do you live near here?"

"Right over there, in a big white house. You can't miss it."

Judith indicated the region at the left of the river by a graceful inclination of her head. "If you get lost, ask for Miss Bancroft's. She 's my aunt—we live together."

"I need n't try to say how much I thank you," said Margery. "It 's useless."

"You do not need to thank me. I 'm only sorry I did n't find you sooner. Good-bye until to-morrow."

"Good-bye. Shall you wait for the Prince?"

"Yes, if he is n't too long in coming. Here, doggie, you 're to stay with me."

A Canoe Appears

The pink gown and white parasol moved slowly in the direction of the village. Algernon, fain to follow, lifted his voice shrilly, but the faithless one did not turn back. Judith held the puppy with difficulty while she untied a long crimson tie of crepe which was knotted beneath her low collar. Presently she had one end around Algernon's neck and the other tied to a diminutive willow sapling back a little way from the shore. "There," she said to herself, "he's anchored, if the thing will hold him."

Unaccustomed to restraint, Algernon lamented loudly, but Judith did not heed him. Her ears were strained to catch another sound. Smiling, with her head inclined toward the water, she waited, with the prescience of a woman in love.

When the dog paused for a moment to rest, she heard the murmur of a paddle in the water and caught her breath quickly. Almost immediately a brown canoe appeared at the bend in the river, with a smiling young man in white flannels kneeling on a crimson cushion in the stern. On the seat in front of him was a handful of wet rose-petals, crimson and pink.

"How did you know?" he called, when he came within speaking distance.

"How did you know?" she echoed, as he turned the canoe toward shore.

"Because those red roses grow only in Miss

The Puppy's Master

Bancroft's garden. Where did the pink ones come from?"

Before she could answer, he had sprung ashore and caught her in his arms. "Sweet," he breathed, as he lifted her face to his, "I 've longed all day for the sight of you. It 's seemed as though evening would never come."

"It has n't—yet," murmured Judith.

"No, but you have."

Then Algernon, having heard and comprehended the sound of a familiar voice, leaped forward, uprooting the slender sapling to which he was tied, and dragging it, by his strand of crimson crepe, to the one god-like human who commanded his undying allegiance. With soft whinings and timorous barks, he greeted his master—who only held Judith more closely in his arms.

"Princess!" he said. "Oh, Woman of Wonder, where did you find my pup?"

II

Algernon

The Big White House

THE big white house was square and uncompromising in outline, but a wide porch surrounded it — two wide porches, rather, since the upper story was similarly favoured. Miss Cynthia was wont to observe that the house was an island bounded by an unlimited sea of porch, and to wish vainly for a real sea to wash over it at high tide, that it might be kept clean.

"If Grandfather had been gifted with imagination," she was saying, "he 'd have made the house long and narrow and all the windows round. Then we could have thought we were living on an ocean-liner, except that it would be so cheap and so comfortable that the illusion would be in danger."

From the rear of the house came the shrill yelpings of an unhappy puppy. "What is that?" demanded Miss Cynthia. "Do I hear something?"

"It 's part of your longed-for illusion, Aunty," replied Judith, with a smile. "It 's the moaning of the tied."

Judith's Story

"Are we possessed by a dog?"

"Temporarily, it seems. I did n't have time to finish my story last night."

"So I observed. When Carter's head appeared above the hedge, you left a young girl in pink hanging to a rail fence by her petticoats and ran down to meet him."

"I did n't want to keep him waiting," Judith apologised, with a blush.

"An evidence of immaturity, my dear, and, if I may be permitted to say so, of inexperience. Men love what they have to wait for. What happened to the girl on the fence?"

"I had to unfasten her gown and help her out of it. She— There 's Carter, now!"

"Sit down," commanded Miss Cynthia, crisply. "After having left her hanging on the fence all night, you have n't the heart to let her stand on the hill all the afternoon in her combinations, have you? It 's not only unkind, but it 's indecent."

"Well," continued Judith, unwillingly, "I got her out of her clothes, and then helped her into them again, and we came down the hill together. She had the puppy with her, and a parasol, and after she drank the cream, she had to go to get more—it was for dessert, or something—and she asked me to keep the dog until today, and so I did. It seems he belongs to Carter."

"How did she get him? No, I don't mean Carter—I mean the dog."

"I did n't have time to ask. I suppose she found him or someone who stole him gave him to her or sold him to her. Come right up, dear," she called, leaning over the balcony.

"Yes, dear," mimicked Miss Cynthia, with a wicked flash in her dark eyes; "come right up. I love to hear your fairy-like tread on this frail veranda."

The long, empty spaces echoed back the young man's ringing laugh. He kissed Judith, with the complacency of an accepted lover, then bent over Miss Cynthia's chair. "You shall pay the penalty for that. Kiss your nephew that is to be!"

"I won't," she answered, tartly. "Please go over there and sit down. The girl has her clothes on, now, but I want to know how she came to drink the cream."

"She was hungry," laughed Judith. "She had been hanging on the fence for hours, and the cream was in a blue pitcher under the elder-bush."

"How did it get there? Fairies?"

"You 'll have to ask her. She said she 'd come over to-day and get the dog."

"Right here," interposed Carter, "is where I come into the story. She 's not only not going to have my dog, but she 'll have to explain how she came to be taking him home with her."

"Why, Carter Keith!" exclaimed Judith. "I 'm ashamed of you!"

Miss Cynthia

"What for?"

"That is n't nice of you—it 's selfish."

"Three things I have longed to see," murmured Miss Cynthia, pointedly. "The sea serpent, a white rhinoceros, and an unselfish man."

The words were sharp, but the light in her eyes and the smile that hovered about the corners of her mouth robbed them of their sting. She leaned back in her low chair and her crutch clattered sharply to the floor. Carter half rose from his chair, but she stopped him, with the merest movement of her hand. Lines of bitterness and rebellion appeared for an instant where the smile had been, and her eyes became sombre, as from smouldering fires. Then the unhappy mood vanished, as quickly as it had come.

Miss Cynthia's hair was silver, but her face was young and always would be. Her delicate skin was peculiarly transparent and the colour that came and went so easily was not the scarlet that from time to time flamed upon Judith's cheeks, but a soft, dull pink. At times she suggested a full-blown pink rose from which the petals had begun to fall, but this only when her eyes were sad. Deep, dark, and strangely brilliant, they dominated not only her face but her body. From the firm, shapely throat that merged softly into the lace of her white gown, down to the small

A passion for Shoes

feet crossed upon a cushion, she was subordinate to the wonderful eyes that expressed her every mood and tense.

The little feet were gaily clad in white silk stockings and white satin shoes with buckles of old silver, exquisitely wrought. There was nothing to indicate that one of them was helpless and always would be. Queerly enough, Miss Cynthia had a passion for shoes and squandered money without stint upon dainty things of velvet and satin in all the colours of the rainbow, with silk stockings to match, embroidered, and, at times, even inset with medallions of real lace.

Once, when she had spent the money that should have gone for taxes upon a fascinating pair of slippers with solid gold buckles, Judith had remonstrated, mildly, but unmistakably.

"I don't know why I should spend money for things I don't want," Miss Cynthia had returned, in self-defence. "I did n't want the tax-receipt, and I did want the slippers. And so—" a gesture of airy disdain permanently closed the incident.

Judith had not spoken of slippers since, except in terms of admiration occasionally mingled with awe. Following the next extravagance, Miss Cynthia had observed, with judicial detachment, that, as her feet were n't useful, they might as well be pretty. She sent a keen glance to Judith as she spoke,

A Dog of Parts

but that wise young woman had not answered, save with a smile.

"Why am I selfish?" asked Carter, in the manner of one athirst for knowledge.

"Because you 're a man," explained Miss Cynthia, with patience.

"Because you 're not willing to give a dog to a little girl who wants him, and spent a bad two hours hanging to a fence on his account," added Judith.

"But, my dear girl, I can't give dogs to everybody."

"Did anybody ask you to?"

"What kind of a dog is he?" queried Miss Cynthia. "Judging by his voice and his industry, he is something more than the summary of a diversified ancestry. He seems to be a dog of parts and distinction."

"He is," answered Carter. "He 's a thoroughbred collie and I spent yesterday scouring the country for him with an automobile."

"I 'm glad you 've scoured it," Miss Cynthia flashed back. "Now all we need is rain."

"If he 's a thoroughbred," Judith continued, "it would be all the nicer of you to give him away."

Carter looked at her to see whether she was in earnest. From the first, he had had a certain fear of Judith, which, man-like, he was unwilling to admit, even to himself. She was so strong, so capable, so perfectly at ease! It

seemed impertinent, in a way, to assist her into an automobile or a boat, to open a door for her, or even to offer her a chair. Yet she had not the faintest suggestion of masculinity; Judith was all woman, though finely tempered and fully adequate to her surroundings.

When she came into a room, she dominated it, by sheer force of personality. She carried herself well, with her chin held high, her stately head thrown back a little, and her dark, beautiful eyes calm, like "waters stilled at even." She met the world upon terms of equality and frank acceptance; she diffused about her a sort of gentleness and refinement; she did not seem to demand consideration, but simply took it, as by right.

"Don't you think," Judith was asking, in her cool voice, "that it would be nice of you?"

"Might be," Carter admitted. He got up and walked about the balcony, with his hands in his pockets. "May I smoke?"

"Certainly."

"Where 's the bone of contention?"

"Down in the back yard. You can't miss him if you 'll follow your ears."

"We 'll come down," said Miss Cynthia, picking up her crutch and cane. She and Judith were upon the lower porch when Carter appeared with the frolicsome Algernon gambolling at his heels—"a frisking morsel beside a vast monument."

A Gift with a String

He was past twenty-eight, but, at that moment, he was only a boy. "Don't ask me to give him away, Judith," he pleaded. "He's such a nice little doggie and he's so glad to see me!"

"You'd give him to me, would n't you?"

"Of course. You shall have him and his entire family, if you so desire."

"To do with as I choose?"

"No. Not to sell or to kill or to give away, but to keep."

"You'd better keep him yourself," smiled Judith. "I don't want a gift with a string to it."

"In the case of quadrupeds," commented Miss Cynthia, "strings are advisable and even necessary. Would you mind getting a rope now? I do not care to have him rampaging around among my flower-beds. Someone once said that 'life had troubles enough now without adding to it cats.' I go considerably farther than that and I want to keep this place petless, if I may."

"'Petless' is a good word," replied Carter. "It's legitimate, which is more than can be said of most coined words. If 'penniless' and 'helpless' and 'merciless' and 'pitiless' and all the other 'lesses' are good English, why not 'petless'?"

"It sounds well," said Judith, thoughtfully. "I suppose 'automobileless' might mean having no car."

"'Motorless' is better," Carter put in. "Where's the clothes line?"

"Too far away to find easily and too new to cut," Judith said. "Wait a minute." She went into the house and returned, shortly, with a wide, soft ribbon of baby blue, over two yards in length.

"Is n't that too nice to use?" asked Carter, doubtfully.

"No," returned Judith, with a smile. "I 'm not selfish."

"Anything personal in that?" he asked, tethering the puppy to one of the fluted columns of the veranda.

"Nothing at all. I was merely offering a bit of information as to my own character."

"Information is unnecessary," he responded, gallantly. "There is nothing that is good and lovely and adorable that you are not. You 're almost too perfect, Judith." His eyes were alight with love and admiration as he spoke.

"Please don't get sentimental," said Miss Cynthia, plaintively. "Leave all that until I 've gone to bed and you two sit out here until the moon gets tired and goes to bed too."

"Do I stay as late as that?" asked Carter, lifting his eyebrows.

"Far be it from me to say. I know it seems well on toward morning when Judith tiptoes upstairs, trying desperately to avoid the squeaky board that always gives her away."

Good Friends

The young man laughed. He and Miss Cynthia were very good friends and he keenly enjoyed her harmless thrusts. She was happy even to sit and look at him, to exult in his magnificent physical strength, to admire the dark locks that would curl a little in spite of heroic daily efforts with a wet brush, to adore his cleanliness, his youth, and the finely-chiselled mouth and chin that carried more than a hint of stubbornness. His hands were large and capable, his dark skin was clear, and he literally radiated the joy of living, if merely for the sake of life itself.

Sometimes, in her black hours, Miss Cynthia envied Judith, though she never wished to take from her the smallest fragment of her happiness. The two had been engaged for a year and were to be married in the Autumn, or whenever the new house was done. They had already discovered that readiness and even eagerness to lie was a marked characteristic of those employed in the building trades.

Judith cared too little for clothes to plan any special trousseau, but for months past she had been embroidering, with the most fairy-like of stitches, the length of sheerest linen she wanted for her wedding gown. She had a passion for it and often said that could she choose but one fabric for all purposes, she would ask for linen, and be well content.

Just now, there was the far-away look in her

eyes that came sometimes when she was at work upon it. She had retreated, as it were, into the virginal silence and austerity of her soul, and closed the door. Carter looked at her a little troubled, because she seemed so alien and apart from him. This was not the Judith he knew and loved, but a woman who in an instant and at will had assumed the quality of remoteness, as some far star. Then his fear was lost in a sudden rush of loyalty, of love, of adoration. To make one's self worthy of this peerless woman was incentive enough for any man to strive, to struggle, and to rise with fresh courage from every defeat.

She was leaning against one of the columns of the porch, looking out into the garden, where Miss Cynthia's roses were all in bloom. Subtle fragrances breathed their exquisite essence into the golden web of the afternoon—the yellow lilies, mint, lavender, rosemary, elder blossoms, and, above all, roses, roses, roses, till the senses were intoxicated with the ecstasy of the humblest among them.

Judith was pale, but not colourless. Her gown was white, and, by contrast, her firm flesh had the glow of ivory, tinted here and there with pink. She wore no jewels save the single splendid ruby set in her betrothal ring—anything more would have made her seem overdressed.

Carter forgot Miss Cynthia and her caution

Margery Appears

about sentiment. He got to his feet, a little unsteadily, and murmured: "Judith!" He choked back an overwhelming emotion as he spoke.

Judith did not turn. "Someone is coming," she said. "I think it 's Miss Gordon."

A youthful figure in pale blue mull opened the gate, entered, and closed it carefully. Margery came up the gravelled walk with a smile that, quite by itself, would take her far upon any way she might choose to go. Her big blue eyes were alluring in their trustfulness; the all-pervading sweetness of her youth and innocence gave her the freshness of morning and Spring.

Judith went to meet her, with both hands outstretched in welcome. "I 'm so glad to see you 're none the worse for your unhappy experience of yesterday. Aunt Cynthia, this is Miss Gordon — my Aunt, Miss Bancroft, of whom I spoke yesterday. Miss Gordon, Mr. Keith. Sit down, please. I think you 'll like this chair."

"Thank you," replied Margery. "I 'd forgotten that this would be Sunday when I told you yesterday that I 'd come to-day, but I promised, so I 'm here. I suppose Algernon has been a perfectly terrible nuisance, but I 'm a thousand times obliged to you."

Algernon, perhaps because he heard his name or from a natural instinct of curiosity, came out from beneath his master's chair.

Naming the Puppy

"Oh, you darling," cried Margery, rushing to him and picking him up in her arms. "Did you miss me? I missed you, abominable little beast though you are!"

Carter had risen. "Might I inquire why you named him Algernon?"

"Because I hate it worse 'n any name I know, and he was such a bad little doggie, but I guess I 'll change it. What would you name him?"

"I had n't named him. I 'd always called him 'the black-and-white one.'"

Margery's face saddened. She dropped Algernon, who whined when he struck the porch. She turned troubled eyes to Judith, full of question and appeal.

"He happens to belong to Mr. Keith," said Judith, kindly. "We 're glad you found him. He 's a thoroughbred collie and a very valuable dog."

The blue eyes filled with tears, the sweet mouth quivered a little, then, swiftly, Margery regained her self-control. "Oh," she said. "I 'm glad I found him too. I 'll have to go now. I promised Mr. Chandler I would n't be gone very long. Good-bye, little doggie—dear little doggie!" Her voice broke on the last words.

"Take him with you, Miss Gordon, if you 'd really like to have him," put in Carter, hastily.

"Oh, but I must n't, if he 's valuable. Thank you, just as much!"

Beautifully Done

"He is n't so valuable that I 'm not glad to give him to somebody who would be kind to him. You see," he continued, lamely, "I have a lot of dogs, all the time—it just happens so, you know, and it 's the hardest thing in the world to find good homes for them. You have no idea how hard it is! I 'd be ever so much obliged to you, if you 'd take him—honestly I would. Only, please don't name him Algernon!"

"I won't," she promised, then immediately forgot it. "Oh, thank you, so much!" She picked up the puppy and offered a small pink hand to Carter. "It 's perfectly lovely of you. Good-bye. Good-bye, Miss Sylvester. Good-bye, Miss Bancroft. I 'd love to come again, if you 'll let me."

She went down the path again, with the puppy after her, blue ribbon and all. At the gate she turned to smile and wave a friendly hand at the little group on the porch. When the last glimmer of the blue gown had vanished upon the road, Judith went to Carter and patted his cheek.

"That was nice of you," she said, warmly. "I like you for it! It was beautifully done!"

Carter made a wry face and shrugged his broad shoulders. "I don't know why I did it, so please don't praise me."

"Why," replied Judith, "it was partly to please me, and partly to please yourself, and partly to please Miss Gordon."

A Vast Difference

"It was decent of you, Carter," commented Miss Cynthia; then, after a significant pause, she added: "One of the most interesting things in the world to me is the vast difference between what people say they are going to do, and what they actually do."

III

The House of Content

In the Gathering Dusk

"DREAMING, Margery?"

The man's gentle voice had low music in it, of the sort that is remembered after it has ceased. His wheeled chair was just within the open door and the girl was on the tiny veranda, sitting upon the top step, leaning against a pillar.

"No—I was just thinking."

"And wondering, perhaps, why your father sent you to me?"

She was startled, but did not betray herself. "If Father wanted me to come, surely that is reason enough."

Martin Chandler beckoned to his attendant. "Outdoors, please." The man pushed the chair out upon the veranda, to its customary corner.

"Is that all, sir?"

"Yes, until I call you."

In the gathering dusk, even, Margery's face was pale. Her small hands, crossed in her lap, seemed pathetically empty and help-

less. The puppy, craving a caress, nosed softly at her arm, but she pushed him away.

"You don't have to stay, you know," said the man, quietly, "but I hope you 'll want to, though it must be dull." She did not answer and, after a pause, he spoke again.

"You look like your father."

"Do I, really? I 'm glad you think so." Then her voice broke pitifully. "Oh, I miss him so!"

"Yes, I can readily understand that."

The sweet scent of the cedars came faintly through the twilight. Deep in their purple darkness, somewhere, a mother-bird was putting her brood to sleep with a murmurous lullaby, soothing the drowsy twitter under the shelter of her wings.

"God never wastes anything, Margery," the man went on. "All the life has risen out of death and all the death has only gone on to be made into life again. Nothing is lost—ever. It 's only changed."

"How do you mean? Has Father——?"

"Father has changed, as you and I will change. Life is immortal, though it expresses itself in forms that 'perish as the leaves.' All things go back, eventually, to the one divine source, as a tiny stream in the mountains finds its way at last to the vast ocean that holds the world in its arms."

The pale gold moon of June came out from

Martin Chandler

behind a cloud and shone full upon Chandler's face. Margery, in the shadow of the veranda, looked up at him curiously, yet with a strange, new sense of approaching peace. He was fifty—and the last twenty-five years of his life had been spent in his wheeled chair and his bed. Suffering and rebellion had left lines upon his face, if one looked for them, but the man's conquest of himself had, in turn, given him a serenity that was noble and beautiful beyond all words.

His dark hair had not whitened entirely, but was only silvered a little. His grey eyes were deep and calm and the strong lines of his profile showed clearly, even in the half-light. The stately figure in the wheeled chair did not suggest helplessness; it seemed that he was there simply because he wanted to be.

"Your father told you, did n't he?" Chandler was saying. "It was a railroad accident."

"Yes," Margery stammered. She crimsoned with shame because he had read her thought, but the kindly dusk hid her face.

"I don't talk about it much," he went on, unemotionally. "I don't deal in horrors. At first I thought I could n't bear it, but I knew, though dimly enough, that God never places a burden upon shoulders unfit to carry it. The work of the world is done by those who are strong and the suffering is borne by those who are brave. Sometimes a coward

A Balanced World

will shift his load and go on, thinking himself free, but he is not. He has lost the power of it, himself, and the strength and courage he needed for it, and had at his command to use, have gone, divinely, with the burden he laid aside.

"When you can see the 'why' of things, they 're no longer hard. The world is perfectly balanced. For every hour of darkness there is one of daylight, for every full tide a corresponding ebb, and for every question there is somewhere an answer."

"Do we always find it?" she asked, quickly.

"I think so—sometime. All that is not clear in this life will be fully understood in some life to come.

"Tell me," he went on, after a pause, "about this afternoon. You know I see nothing except what comes to me."

"Why—it was nothing. I just went up there. They were all outside, so I did n't go into the house. Miss Sylvester was there, and a Mr. Keith, and Miss Bancroft, the old lady. Miss Sylvester calls her 'Aunt Cynthia.'"

"I know Miss Sylvester and Mr. Keith. They come here often. They 're to be married soon."

"Are they?" asked Margery, idly. "I did n't know. He seems nice and she 's lovely. I liked her the minute I saw her."

"Before you saw her, almost, did n't you?"

Human or a Saint

"Yes. It seems funny now, but it was n't at all amusing yesterday. When I saw her red parasol turn into the road that led up the hill, I could have danced for joy—if I could have moved my feet."

"Red usually means danger."

"Yesterday it meant salvation. She was more than kind."

"Yes, she always is. You can sit down and think of everything a woman ought to be—even write it out, if you choose, and when you get through you 'll discover that you 've written an accurate description of Judith Sylvester. Sometimes I wonder whether she 's merely human, like the rest of us, or a saint temporarily come to earth to make us think better of a world that has her in it.

"I 've often wished I knew Miss Bancroft, but she 's a shut-in, like myself, and so we 've never met, though we 've lived in the same town for twenty years or so. Occasionally we send friendly messages to one another, by Judith, or exchange books, but that 's all. I don't even know what she looks like. No one sees her very much, except Judith and Keith. I don't like to ask Judith to describe her aunt, and, of course, a man can't discuss a lady with another man. Sometimes Judith tells me of funny things she says and does, and I 've often pictured her to myself, but I 'm probably wrong."

A Mental Portrait

"Tell me—how does she seem to you?"

"I 've pictured her as very tall and stately, with her shoulders stooped a little on account of her crutch, dark hair just beginning to turn, deep blue eyes, or grey, perhaps; regular features, rather a large mouth with very white regular teeth and a frank smile, and a crisp, clear voice, not shrill, but rather high."

Margery laughed. "Am I wrong?" he asked. "Don't tell me I 'm wrong!"

"Oh, but you are—absolutely! She was n't out of her chair, but I could see that she was n't very tall. She 's a little person, not nearly as big as I am. Her hair is entirely white and it shines in the sun like spun silver, and her eyes are very dark and wonderful—they 're brilliant, like jewels. She has a lovely skin, clear and delicate, with soft colour in it, a sweet mouth, plump little hands with dimples at the knuckles, and a beautiful voice, soft but not low. She wore white and had on white satin shoes with silver buckles."

"I see," returned Chandler, after a brief silence. "I 'll have to change my mental portrait of her. How old is she?"

"Sixty, by her hair—thirty-five or forty by her face."

"And how old by her mind and soul?"

"I don't know," laughed Margery. "How many ages are there for the same person?"

"Three—one of the body, one of the mind,

Three Ages

and one of the soul. Sometimes a soul of six and a mind of fifteen are shut up in a body of thirty or more, and again, in a body of twenty there 'll be a mind of about the same age and a very old soul. You see all sorts of queer combinations. This is what makes life so unfailingly interesting. We can measure the age of the body by years, but not the others."

"I don't see why not."

"Because they all grow differently and have different standards of measurement. You could n't ask for a yard of water or a peck of linen, could you? A body progresses with a certain regularity, according to the measure of time, but the others grow by leaps and bounds and not according to time at all. In one night, sometimes, the soul of a girl becomes the soul of an old woman. The body grows by food and work, the mind by use, and the soul through joy and pain."

"How old am I?" she asked, curiously.

"About twenty—in body."

"And the rest?"

"I don't know. I can tell better after you 've been here a little while. I hope you 'll want to stay. You 're the prettiest thing that 's ever been in this old house, Margery. In the few days you 've been here, you 've made it seem more like a home than I ever thought it could."

"I'm glad," she returned, gently. "I have no home of my own, now that Father——"

"Share mine, little girl, and let me try to take his place as far as I may. If I had ever had a daughter, I should have wanted her to be like you."

Chandler's attendant came out of the house, swinging a lantern. He went down the road a little way, to the point where the other road crossed it, and came back empty-handed.

"Where does he go?" asked Margery.

"Just to the cross-roads, to hang a light upon the sign. It is better that it should hang there for three hundred and sixty-four nights without being needed, than to miss a night when some wayfarer may pass and take the wrong road."

"Did you put up the sign?"

"Yes," he laughed. "That is, I had it done. You and I are beginning to know each other."

At the corner, just below the house, there was a sign with a weather vane on top of it, directing the traveller East or West, with the name of the nearest town and the distance. A cross-arm, fastened to the same post, gave similar information regarding points North and South.

"I shall never go myself," he went on, "but I may show others the way. So much that hurts and distresses us comes from taking the wrong road."

Harder Luck Than Mine

The grim pity of it came suddenly to Margery, and her eyes filled. "Never out of this house and yard," she said, half to herself; then, to him, inquiringly: "An automobile, perhaps?"

"No," he answered, firmly. "Keith has been here a dozen times with that trumpeting red monster of his, to allure me into further danger. I 'm thankful to be able to stay here—so I shall stay.

"At first," he resumed, after a brief silence, "when it seemed that I simply could not bear it, I got a little blank-book and began to put down the names of people I knew who were worse off than I. There were only two or three, so I took up history and biography as a serious business, and whenever I found a man who had harder luck than mine, I put him down in the book.

"Presently my list began to assume the proportions of the one the man sings about in *The Mikado*. It outgrew the book, then filled another, and by the time I 'd filled the third one I felt better. I have them put away somewhere now, all labelled: 'People Who Are Worse Off Than I Am.'"

"Do you ever read them over?"

"I have n't, for years. I admit, however, that the first volume in the series is pretty well worn out and the second one frayed. The last pages in the third are comparatively fresh, but some of the poor fellows whose names are

written there would have been mighty glad to change places with me."

Tapestry of Dreams

"I see," said Margery, slowly. "If I should do that—why, I 'd have to put down almost everybody."

"Yes," smiled Chandler, "you have youth, beauty, health, sufficient income, and a thousand other things. Sit down some day and write out all you have to be thankful for, if you can find a ledger that will hold it all. And don't forget the things you have had, even though you have them no longer. What we 've had is ours forever, in a way, to keep, and to make the dreams of."

"Dreams?" she repeated, wondering what he meant.

"Child, in the House of Life there is much that is wrong. Penetrate deeply into the secret existence of anyone about you, even of the man or woman whom you count happiest, and you will come upon things they spend all their efforts to hide. Fair as the exterior may be, if you go in, you will find bare places, heaps of rubbish that can never be taken away, cold hearths, desolate altars, and windows veiled with cobwebs. Yet, if the owner is wise, these things will be concealed by a marvellous tapestry of dreams.

"Sometimes a woman, bitterly disappointed in her husband, shelters him behind her own ideal of him and smilingly bids the world

The Real and the Ideal

admire and even approach, but not too near—oh, never too near! Where anyone has failed us, see how we strive to hide it, and when we ourselves have failed, there is always someone ready to help us, in turn. But because the dream persists and the tapestry is beautiful beyond words, we have always something to live up to. It's only the everlasting difference between the real and the ideal, the vision and the fact, and to bring the two as near together as possible is the one object of those who weave the dreams.

"I sit here in my little house at the cross-roads, and, in fancy, the whole world goes by me. My corner might be the meeting-place for all the nations of the earth, since the roads run straight. Turk and Japanese, South African and Eskimo, could exchange salutations at my sign-post if they chose.

"And, by knowing a few people well, I know the whole world, for human nature is the same the world over and does not change. Having only a drop of water, a microscope, and a dream, I fashion from it the sea. I know it, perhaps, as he does not, who only crosses it in a ship."

Margery was silent. The twilight had deepened into darkness, and, farther on, the twinkling lights in the other houses went out, one by one. A cheerful little clock in the living-room struck nine, a busy, impertinent

A Negative Possession

one in the kitchen repeated it, and then the tall grandfather's clock in the hall boomed out nine solemn strokes, with finality and approval.

"May I say good-night now?" she asked.

"Surely. I wish you pleasant dreams. If the other sort come, we will banish them together, for this is the House of Content."

"Good-night." She offered him her hand, then, moved by an impulse of quick tenderness, stooped to kiss him lightly upon the forehead.

Smiling, he turned his head to watch her as she took a candle from the table in the hall, lighted it, and went upstairs. Still retaining a little of the dear awkwardness of youth, she stumbled, once or twice, upon the unfamiliar stairs. Her soft step came lightly from overhead; he heard one window opened, another closed, and a shade drawn. Then her light streamed out upon the cedars, bringing a faint iridescence from their purple depths. The memory of her light kiss lingered still upon his forehead, as though the wing of a butterfly had brushed him in passing.

His face settled into unaccustomed lines of sadness. Out of all Life had to give, he had received so pitifully little! The House of Content could never be more than a refuge; it was, at the best, a negative possession. He longed for home and children that night as he had never longed for them before. If Margery

A Lonely Man

had been his own flesh and blood, instead of the daughter of his dead friend, he might have held her close in his arms for a moment before she went away for the night.

"Whatever is mine I shall have and I shall keep." He said the words aloud, as he had many times. The phrase had become a habit with him when the iron entered his soul. Swiftly his thought followed it: "And I don't want anything that is n't mine, and so——"

"Are you ready now, sir?"

His man appeared in the doorway, unobtrusively offering service. Chandler waved him away.

"Not yet. Come back in fifteen minutes."

"Very well, sir."

The light from upstairs, striking the cedars, threw the rest of the place into shadow. The small white house was set back a little way from the street; there was a bit of lawn and a white picket fence and a shrub or two, but no garden. At the corner, where the roads from East and West met those from North and South, his lantern illumined a wide circle upon the gravel. He had carefully timed his beacon-light and knew that it would burn until dawn. A larger lantern was used in Winter.

Margery's light went out. Chandler sighed, from loneliness and hunger. The things he was never to have, pressed their denial bitterly upon him now.

Rebellious

"What has she done to me?" he asked of himself. "Has she stirred up all these years of useless raging against Fate? I wonder if she has!"

The man came to the door again. "Ready, sir?"

"Yes," sighed Chandler. "Take me into the library and bring the light to the bookcase."

For half an hour or longer he sought vainly among books, behind books, and in desk and table-drawers that had not been opened for a long time. His man helped him into bed, arranged the reading-lamp upon the table near him, put the bell and the pitcher of water within his reach, and went into his own little room adjoining.

Presently the house was quiet, save for the striking clocks, but while the lantern burned at the cross-roads, another light burned too. Impatient, and bitterly rebellious, Chandler sat up in bed until sunrise, reading through his entire list of "People Who Are Worse Off Than I Am."

IV

Marked Passages

A Robin's Call

A WAYFARING robin, having been afield since before dawn, paused upon Margery's window-sill to rest. The sun shone full upon her face and the mass of yellow hair that lay upon her pillow, bringing forth gleams of gold, with here and there an unsuspected tint of copper.

The robin chirped inquiringly, but the little figure upon the big mahogany four-poster did not stir. He called once more, as to a comrade, and yet again, but there was no answer. With a final twitter, he flew away, just as the blue eyes opened.

"Was n't there a robin?" murmured Margery, drowsily. "I thought there was a robin, in a cherry tree that had just bloomed."

The clocks struck seven, bidding the laggards to rise. She sat up and rubbed her eyes, wondering where she was. Oh, yes, she remembered now. Father was dead and she was in Mr. Chandler's house at Edgerton, where Father had asked her to go. Tears

Youth and June

came at the memory, then swiftly she brushed them away. What was it that Mr. Chandler had said last night—that Father was not lost, but only changed? She must not forget that, for there was mysterious comfort in the thought.

Because she was young and it was June, she was singing to herself before she had fairly begun to dress. She loved the splash of the cool water upon her neck and arms, smiled at the pink and white and golden vision that smiled back at her from the mirror, and by the time she had plaited her hair into a heavy, shining braid that hung far below her waist, she was fancying herself a mermaid upon the coral reefs of some far blue sea, luring passing ships to their destruction.

Her room appealed to her girlish love of prettiness. If a woman had done it—say Miss Sylvester—instead of old Eliza in the kitchen downstairs, it could not have been more lovely. She did not guess that Judith had done it, at Mr. Chandler's request, nor did she guess with what anxiety the lonely man had awaited her coming.

If she could have seen the expression of his face, as he fingered samples of dimity, chintz, and cretonne, after Judith had assured him that a young woman of twenty would be sure to want pink-and-white draperies with old mahogany furniture, she might have been

Margery's Room

touched a little, but, in all probability, would have been only amused.

All the details of the room showed a woman's forethought and planning, from the roses that climbed a trellis upon the wall paper to blossom in pink-and-white profusion at the frieze, to the chintz-covered screen in the corner that opened into a wonderful arrangement of pockets for the innumerable small belongings of a dainty girl's wardrobe. The chintz-covered couch was heaped with pillows and was so deep and soft that Margery might sleep there if she liked, on hot nights, when it would be cool near the window. There was a low sewing-chair, a big easy-chair, and a straight-backed chair at the dressing-table, all with cushions of the rose-strewn chintz.

Chandler's tired face softened with a smile when she came downstairs. "Will you button me?" she asked, backing up to his chair. "Father always did—just those four buttons in the middle that I can't reach."

"You must forgive me if I 'm awkward," he replied, fumbling at the buttons. "I 've never done it before."

"You 'll soon learn," she assured him, in a matter-of-fact tone, "but, if you 'd rather not, I 'll go to Eliza."

"Please don't. At fifty it 's none too early to learn to do such things."

"How long have you been up?"

Light Reading

"Oh—longer than you have, I fancy. It 's a lot nicer to be buttoning a pretty girl's gown than to be roasted on a grill."

"Who was roasted?" demanded Margery, turning.

"I was just thinking about St. Laurence. He was fried, you know, and they 've named crabs after him. Have you never eaten Crabs *à la* St. Laurence?"

Margery had n't.

"Neither have I. I 've just read about 'em in cook-books."

"Do you read cook-books?"

"Once in a while, for light reading, and sometimes when I 'm hungry and Eliza's cooking has missed the mark. After you 've read half a cook-book you 're not hungry at all. You 've absorbed food with your mind and your body has forgotten about it."

"I 'll cook for you," returned the girl, eagerly. "I can make fudge, and chocolate cake, and lemonade with mint in it, and two kinds of cornstarch pudding—yellow and white."

"You shall make them all some day, and we 'll have a feast. Are you ready for breakfast now?"

"Very much so."

In spite of the wheeled chair, it was pleasant to be in the sunny dining-room and watch Margery as she sat opposite him, pouring his

Lots of Things

coffee. Had things gone right with him, long ago— resolutely he put the tormenting thought aside. All the joy of life, for him, had been crowded into one splendid hour that had vanished as quickly as it had come.

"Shall I bother you if I bring my sewing down here?" she asked, when they had finished breakfast.

"No, indeed! I wish you would!"

"What do you do?" she queried, when they were settled upon the veranda. "How do you keep from getting lonely?"

"I don't," he muttered; then added, in another tone: "Lots of things. I read, and play on the violin, and write sometimes."

"What do you write?"

"Letters, mostly, and now and then a story."

"Oh, how lovely! For the magazines?"

"For, but not in," he replied, carefully differentiating his prepositions. "Three things are certain—taxation, death, and the returned manuscript."

"Do they send them back?"

"Usually. Once in a while one gets lost, but it doesn't happen very often. The relation between people and print is very interesting. Some get in free, others pay to get in, and some pay to keep out. And when it comes to literature, or what passes for it, some people get their stuff printed free, others

pay to have it done, and still others are paid by the people who print it."

"Must be nice to be paid," commented Margery, threading her needle.

"It is. I was, once, and I 've never forgotten it. Two dollars, for a joke. It was a great stimulant to my sense of humour. I 've looked, ever since, for the funny side of things."

"Have you always managed to find it?"

"Nearly always, I think, though it 's never proved remunerative. Judith says it has paid me handsomely, but intangibly."

"She 's beautiful, I think."

"Yes. She comes Mondays and Thursdays to play accompaniments for me while I fiddle."

"Then she 'll be here to-day?"

"This afternoon, at two. She adds to her other virtues the gift of punctuality, which is said to be the politeness of kings. When Judith opens the gate I can safely set my watch at two. If it is a minute or so out of reckoning, one way or the other, it 's the watch, not Judith."

It was ten minutes past the hour, by Margery's tiny gold watch, when Judith appeared at the cross-roads. Following Chandler's hint, she made the correction when Judith lifted the rusty latch and called cheerfully: "Good afternoon, everybody!" She had a roll of music, two books, a bottle, and her red parasol.

"I can't shake hands," she laughed, as she

A Note from Miss Cynthia

came up to the veranda, "until I have laid down my burdens. Here 's a new novel for Miss Gordon——"

"Margery, please," the girl interrupted, as she took it. "I wish you would."

"I 'll be glad to, Margery, if you will call me Judith. Here 's a bottle of Aunt Cynthia's currant wine from me," she continued, to Chandler, "and a book from her, and new music for both of us from Carter. Is n't it a lovely world and is n't everybody kind to everybody else!"

Chandler had unwrapped the book while she was speaking. As he had hoped, there was a note inside. "May I?" he asked; then, taking consent for granted, he read, in Miss Bancroft's quaint, old-fashioned hand:

"Dear Friend:

"I have enjoyed this, so I pass it on to you. I hope you won't mind my having marked it. Keep it as long as you like. I was much interested in the magazine article you sent, as you knew I would be. If you have anything I have n't read, please send it by Judith. My mind is as a parched prairie and I 'm praying for rain.

"Yours,

"Cynthia Bancroft."

Margery, meanwhile, was looking at Judith

The Serpent from the City

with frank admiration. She had chosen a scarlet gown that afternoon, relieved with touches of black, and was as resplendent as an Oriental poppy might be, had it fragrance as well as beauty. She had dominated the place from the moment she came to it. Everything else was subordinate and accessory to her.

"How is Miss Bancroft?" Chandler asked.

"Very well, thank you, and especially happy this afternoon. The shopping agent has just come out from town with a caravan of lovely things. When I go back, to-night, we shall be paupers as far as Aunt Cynthia is concerned. It 's fortunate for us both that I have a little money of my own."

Four times each year a woman of taste and discernment went to Miss Bancroft, who was an easy prey to everything but hats. As she never went outside her own hedge, she needed nothing but the lace scarf she habitually wore on cool evenings. She disdained gloves, for the same reason, and wraps of all sorts, though she had once yielded to the charms of a long white opera coat encrusted with lace and silver and lined with white fur. Shoes, gowns, lingerie, and expensive daintiness for her dressing-table were the things that allured her most.

"When I left," Judith was saying, "the Serpent from the City was tempting her with a hat—a wonderful affair of white lace, real,

Man's Love and Woman's Love

too, if you please, heavy with white plumes and dazzling with a most marvellous buckle of brilliants. The Serpent was telling her that she ought to have it to wear on cool evenings when she sat out on the porch until late—it would be so lovely with her white coat. She 'd brought one of those Egyptian scarfs, too, a white one all glitter and sparkle—the sort you buy by the pound—and a new perfume that sells for five dollars an ounce. It made me think of a bit of verse I read somewhere about a caravan coming from China with silks, spices, and myrrh, and the tinkle of the camel's bells, only the bells in this case are profanely replaced by the horn on the Serpent's automobile."

"Has she a car?" asked Margery.

"Of course she has a car! Has n't Aunt Cynthia been buying things from her for years and years? She may have two or three, unless she 's a thrifty person who wants to keep money in the bank for emergencies.

"Apropos of the automobile, Aunt Cynthia observed, just as I was leaving, that it was like man's love—easy to get but hard to keep."

"Like woman's love, too, perhaps," laughed Chandler. He was enjoying himself very much.

"Woman's love is rather the reverse of that, I think," returned Judith. "Hard to get but

easy to keep. Let me take that bottle of wine into the house and put it into a cool place."

As she picked it up, the cork came out and a dark stream ran down the front of her scarlet gown. Chandler was distressed, but Judith hastened to assure him that the damage was not permanent. "Take me upstairs, please," she said to Margery. "A little cold water will make me right again. We seem to take turns scrubbing each other." Then, as they went into the hall: "Did you like your room?"

"Oh, so much! It 's altogether the loveliest room I 've ever had."

"I 'm glad you like it," Judith answered; then the voices were lost in a pleasant feminine murmur that came agreeably to Chandler's ears.

He picked up the book Miss Bancroft had sent him, read her note again, then slipped it between the leaves. A marked passage confronted him, and, idly, he read:

"And though we choose to right or to left of us, on the heights or in the shallows; though, in our struggle to break through the enchanted circle that is drawn around all the acts of our life, we do violence to the instinct that moves us and try our hardest to choose against the choice of destiny, yet shall the woman we elect always have come to us, straight from the unvarying star."

He threw the book aside, his face working.

Like a Sunbeam

In a few moments he was himself again and when Judith and Margery came back, with the stain removed, he showed no signs of agitation.

Until late in the afternoon he and Judith sat at the piano, trying the new music. "We 're doing very well, I think," he said.

"Yes, are n't we? But we 'll have to do it a lot better before we try to play it for Carter."

"We 'll have a dinner-party," Chandler suggested. "You and Carter and Margery and I, with music afterward. Margery can cook—chocolate cake and two kinds of pudding."

"Is n't she dear!" said Judith, with a low, sweet laugh. Through the window they could see Margery as she sat on the veranda, with her sewing cast aside, vainly endeavouring to teach Algernon to sit up on his hind legs and shake hands.

"She came into this old house like a sunbeam," sighed Chandler. "I begin to feel as if I had a daughter, and I dread to have her go away."

"But she 's not going, is she?"

"I don't know. She came merely in obedience to her father's dying request. No time limit was set upon her stay, but of course she 'll go, sometime. It must be incredibly dull here."

"Perhaps not as dull as you think," returned Judith, kindly.

An Invitation

Margery came in, just then, with the puppy under her arm. "He can almost sit up," she announced, "but he won't shake hands. Sit up, Algernon—there, that 's right. Oh, did you hurt your little nose?"

"Won't you come home with me," asked Judith, "and stay to dinner? Aunt Cynthia would be so glad to have you."

"I 'd like to," replied Margery, with a doubtful glance at Chandler.

"Go," he said eagerly. "Please do."

"Won't you miss me?"

"Not I," he parried. "Have n't I a new book?"

"We 'll see that you get home safely," interposed Judith. "Perhaps Carter will take us out in the car to-night, if it is n't being repaired."

"I must dress, then. Will you wait? I shan't be long."

"That was kind," said Chandler, gratefully, as Margery's door closed upstairs. "It must be lonely for her here. I 'm poor company for anybody and especially for a young woman."

"I 'm sure you 're not fishing for a compliment. Don't I come twice a week and am I not young?"

"Both young and beautiful, but I have no delusions about your coming. It 's only your unselfishness and kindness of heart, expressing itself as your nature demands."

Mr. Chandler's Request

"I was n't fishing, either," she assured him, playfully, but the heightened colour in her cheeks showed that she was pleased.

When Margery came down, Chandler had found a book for Miss Cynthia, and, upon a corner of the library table, had written a brief note, carefully phrased, thus:

"DEAR FRIEND:

"Thank you for Judith and the wine and the book. I shall like it the more because you have marked it. Already I feel that I know you, through the subtle freemasonry of your marked passages. Will you please send me your photograph?

"M. C."

Margery was in white, with her yellow hair piled high on her shapely head. To Chandler's delight, she went to him, instead of Judith, to be buttoned. "Just the four in the middle that I can't reach. You 're improving. In a week, you 'll be doing as well as Father."

He was smiling when they went away, arm in arm, leaving Algernon, who was fain to follow, lamenting at the gate. At the cross-roads they both turned back, to wave friendly farewells at the man whom they could not see, but who, as they surmised, would watch them until they were out of sight.

For a long time he sat there, thinking. The

memory of Margery's presence lingered in the house like a slowly fading light. Indefinable fragrances filled the room; the echo of her laughter seemed not to have died away.

Similar Experience

His face saddened, then he said, aloud: "Whatever is mine I shall have and I shall keep. And what is n't mine, I surely don't want."

He took up the book again, and read one marked passage after another. An hour later, his man came to tell him that dinner was ready, but he only waved him away and asked for the reading lamp. Miss Cynthia had marked this, not with a parenthesis, as was her wont, but with heavy lines underneath:

"Is it not silence that determines and fixes the savour of love? Deprived of it, love would lose its eternal essence and perfume. Who has not known those silent moments which separated the lips to reunite the souls?"

In the margin she had written, very lightly: "Where?"

"Where, indeed!" Chandler echoed, in his thought. More than once he had suspected her of experience similar to his own. This passage was in the familiar parenthesis:

"It is death that is the guide of our life and our life has no goal but death. Our death is the mould into which our life flows: it is death that has shaped our features."

Margery's Return

Once more, in the margin, she had written, very faintly: "When?" Chandler's thought repeated hers. "When?"

It was almost midnight when the automobile left Margery at the gate and purred noisily on. She came in, humming, surprised to find him waiting for her.

"Did you have a good time?"

"Lovely. I 'll tell you all about it tomorrow."

"Pleasant dreams, Margery."

"And to you."

"And though we choose to right or to left of us," Chandler read again, "on the heights or in the shallows; though, in our struggle to break through the enchanted circle that is drawn around all the acts of our life, we do violence to the instinct that moves us and try our hardest to choose against the choice of destiny, yet shall the woman we elect always have come to us, straight from the unvarying star."

A light step sounded beside him. "I forgot," said Margery. "I 'm sorry. Miss Bancroft gave me a note for you. Good-night again." She was lovelier than ever as she stood in the half-light of the candle she carried, in a turquoise blue kimono, her little bare feet thrust into blue satin Chinese slippers, embroidered in green and gold, and her wonderful golden hair rippling almost to her feet.

Miss Cynthia's Answer

"Good-night, my dear. Thank you for coming back."

When her door had closed, he tore the note open, eagerly, while his book slipped unheeded to the floor. Then he smiled at the characteristic whimsicality of it. Without the grace of a beginning, it said, merely:

"No. I won't.

"C. B."

V

Pillows

Carter's Pets

AS Carter had told Margery, he had "a lot of dogs, all the time." He had not outgrown a boyish passion for pets, and in addition to a thriving kennel of collies, he kept pigeons and rabbits, though he was secretly ashamed to admit the existence of the rabbits.

The four corners of the Warner place were devoted to live stock—pigeon-house, chicken-house, rabbit-hutch, and dog-house. The chickens belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Warner and were the only profitable part of the menagerie.

An article in a stray copy of an agricultural journal had led Carter to believe that, if he had a few pigeons, he might, in a year or two, give up the practice of law in the City and devote himself to raising squabs for the market. A hurried calculation on the margin of the paper showed him that, at the normal rate of increase, it would eventually take four men, divided into two shifts, all day and all night to get the squabs ready to ship. Every morning, of course, he would go down, inspect

"Keith's Squabs"

each bird, tie its legs together with a red string, and put a tag on it: "Keith's Squabs."

At first he considered the advisability of using his full name. "Carter Keith's Squabs" looked better, upon the whole, but, as the brand became known, it might lead to embarrassment. Judith, for instance, when she had "Mrs. Carter Keith" on her visiting cards, might be asked occasionally if she were "the Squab Woman." And he was very sure that some of his friends in town would christen him "the Squab Lawyer," and that, with the fatality attending such things, the name would stick.

Then the feathers—pillow-factories would be glad to get them, if the price was right. Where were the pillow-factories anyhow? He made a memorandum in his note-book: "Find P. F's—get feather rates and particulars." The first few pillows, of course, he would want himself, being about to go to housekeeping. Or, would Judith think he was infringing upon her province? Already she had gone to town several times on the mysterious excursions that women call "shopping." Perhaps they had pillows.

"Aunt Belinda," he inquired, at the breakfast table, "does the bride buy the pillows?"

"What pillows? What bride?" queried Mrs. Warner, somewhat startled, though by this time well accustomed to irrelevant questions.

Following Up a Clue

"Any bride—all pillows. Er—sofa, and that sort of thing, you know," he concluded, with a comprehensive gesture.

"Why—I guess so." The old lady took off her spectacles, wiped them on a corner of the tablecloth, and readjusted them.

"Did you?"

"I disremember. Yes, I did. We had geese and Ma and me saved the feathers and made my pillows."

"Suppose you had n't had geese and Uncle Henry had—would he have made the pillows?"

"He did have geese. Everybody had, in those days."

"Did he give you the feathers?"

"No, he gave 'em to his sister-in-law's cousin. She was married six months before we was. She was a master-hand at patchwork. My, her quilts! She always got the first prize at the county fair—she got it three years hand-runnin' for the same quilt. Mine was n't nothin', alongside of hers."

Carter's legal mind, eagerly following up a clue, was not thus to be diverted. "Why did n't Uncle Henry give you his feathers, instead of saving them for his cousin's sister-in-law?"

"Sister-in-law's cousin, I said. She 's Mis' Jacob Simms, over to Jonesville. I had one of them souverine post-cards from her yesterday

with a picture of her husband's store on it. You can see the sign in the picture as plain as day: 'Simms' General Store.' Don't it beat all what they can do with them cards?"

"Sister-in-law's cousin, then. Why did n't he give you his feathers?"

"Ma and me had enough of our own. Do you suppose I 'd have gone around askin' my intended for feathers when I had plenty?"

"But if you had n't had any?"

"I 'd have got 'em, someway."

"From him?"

"Perhaps—why?"

"Oh, I just wanted to know. What else did you buy when you went to housekeeping?"

"The sheets and pillow-slips and towels, all the tablecloths and napkins, two blankets, one comfort, and six quilts all pieced by hand. Ma give us a churn and a big rag rug, and Henry's pa give us two stoves and a cow, and Henry's Uncle Ned give us a sausage grinder."

"Never mind all the wedding-presents. I was just asking about the feathers."

"Your last question," rejoined Aunt Belinda, with some asperity, "unless I dis-remember it, was 'What else did you buy when you went to housekeeping?'"

"So it was," returned Carter, good-humouredly. "I beg your pardon. I was merely endeavouring to discover the established precedent."

The Collie's Punishment

"The—what?"

"The usual custom."

"Oh!" Then, by a characteristically feminine process, independent of logic, Aunt Belinda's mind penetrated the inmost recesses of the young man's thought. "Why don't you ask her?" she suggested, kindly.

Carter blushed as he rose from the table. "Thank you. I believe I will. I had n't thought of that."

Aunt Belinda followed him to the door. "Mr. Keith," she said timidly, "don't you think that poor dog has suffered enough?"

"What dog?" He was unable, for the moment, to compass the vast distance between pillows and pups.

"The one in the shed, with the rabbit tied to his neck. He 's been there three days now, and when the wind comes from that way——"

"Oh!" With an effort, he recalled the half-grown collie that had killed a baby rabbit, and, with the body of his victim fastened to his collar, had been shut up in a dark shed to repent of his sins, with only a pail of water to sustain him. "Yes, I guess so. I 'll go out there."

"Your Uncle Henry 'll bury the rabbit," she called after him, then she added, to herself, "it needs it."

Shamefaced, hungry, and ill, the collie came sheepishly to his master when Carter opened

A Moral Lesson

the door of the shed. Relieved of his odorous burden, he followed him out into the yard, blinking in the bright sunlight.

"That 'll be about the last rabbit you 'll take any interest in, old man, unless I 'm much mistaken," Carter remarked, half to himself. "There 's a highly moral lesson in it, for even so do our sins follow us. Go on up to the house now and ask for something to eat."

With a farewell pat, he dismissed the dog and started at a run for the eight-seventeen train.

Uncle Henry had just left the barn with two tin pails full of foaming milk. The dog nosed at them eagerly, with pathetic little whines. "Learned yer lesson?" inquired the old man. "If you have, you can have breakfast—otherwise not."

"I 'll feed him, Father," called Mrs. Warner, from the porch. "You go and bury that rabbit."

Having become accustomed to obedience early in his matrimonial career, "Father" dutifully did as he was requested. When he came back, the collie was asleep in the sun, his penance over.

Murmurous coos came from the pigeon-houses, a cheery and industrious medley rose from the chicken yard, and shrill barks and yelpings came from the kennels. A white-winged pensioner of Carter's fluttered down

Carter's Place

from the roof, drank from a deep tile set into the ground, and went back to his own corner. Mr. Warner settled down into an old chair on the back porch, with a long sigh of content.

From within came the clatter of pots and pans, the rumble of stove-lids, and the brisk strokes of a broom. As Aunt Belinda worked, she sang to herself, in a quavering old voice somewhat off the key, but with a peculiar sweetness. Carter had lived with them for five or six years and seemed more like a son than a mere boarder. The two old people had a little room downstairs, off the sitting-room, and the entire second floor was given over to the young man. At his own expense, he had fitted up a modern bath-room, with a shower, and he had a sitting-room, den, and bedroom, as well as an extra bedroom for an occasional guest.

In reality the place was his, at a very moderate rental. He had gradually replaced the worn old furniture with that of his own choosing, and the faded carpets by good rugs. The old people adored him and spent their lives in the endeavour to anticipate his slightest wish. When he bought his automobile, Uncle Henry had a new shed built for it, and laboriously made a wide path from the shed to the road. Once, when Carter brought home the menu of a banquet, Aunt Belinda studied it for two days, then posted Uncle Henry off to

town on a very hot day to buy three or four new cook-books which she had seen advertised in her household journal. She experimented faithfully, but as nothing seemed to turn out right she went back to the simple fare she knew so well how to provide.

In return, Carter gave them something more than a tolerant tenderness. He remembered birthdays, was generous at Christmas, subscribed for the magazines they liked, and occasionally gave Aunt Belinda a rose or two from the huge boxes he brought out from town for Judith. Once he took them both to dinner at his club and afterward to the theatre, but as their excitement and mystification seemed greater than their pleasure, he had not done it again.

Aunt Belinda came out on the porch, wiping her flushed face with her apron. "He was askin' about pillows," she began, as she sank into a dilapidated chair.

"What was he askin'?" "He," in the Warner household, always meant Carter.

"Everything but what he wanted to know. I suppose that's the way of a lawyer. He wanted to know whether he would have to buy the pillows or she would, but he kept askin' me about the feathers you give your sister-in-law's cousin when she was married."

Any mention of the approaching wedding always saddened the old people. Aunt Belinda

The Way of Children

took off her spectacles and wiped away a bit of mist. "Someways it don't seem as if I could have him go away," she said, with lips that quivered a little. "If we'd had children——"

"If we'd had children," Uncle Henry interrupted, "they'd have got married and gone off and left us and we'd have felt worse. It's accordin' to the way of children. You and I did it."

"I've been thinkin' these last few days," rejoined Aunt Belinda, "that I know now how Ma felt when we driv' away. I remember she was cryin' and I never understood how she could when we was so happy. The day that boy quits trampin' around overhead till we're afraid the ceilin's comin' down, and puttin' his wet towels on the floor and coverin' the whole place with his litter, and begins to move his menagerie——"

"There, there, Mother," comforted Uncle Henry, "don't take it so hard. We've got each other left and that's all we started out with."

"It's more than wonderful and magnificent," Carter was saying. "It's astonishing."

Miss Cynthia had succumbed to the metropolitan wiles of the Serpent and bought the hat, as Judith had foreseen. She was wear-

ing it, even though they were in the house. Since she bought it, she had taken it off only to sleep.

"You may say anything you like about it," returned Miss Cynthia, somewhat on the defensive, "but you can't tell me that it is n't becoming."

"No," Carter rejoined, in his most judicial manner, "I can't. That is, unless I want to lie, and, as Aunt Belinda says, 'I do admire' to tell the truth."

Miss Cynthia's cheeks were pink and her eyes sparkled brilliantly. The hat was large, even for the fashion of a period given to extremes in hats. It was composed simply of Irish lace, a twist of tulle, a mass of white plumes, and a buckle that put the evening stars to shame. One long plume, drooping lightly over the brim to Miss Cynthia's shoulder, might conceivably have stirred covetousness in the soul of Henry of Navarre.

"We might rent it," suggested Judith, mischievously.

"Not while I 'm wearing it," the owner flashed back.

"I did n't mean that. But from half-past ten, say, until three or four in the morning—that 's the time you 'd naturally expect a hat of that sort to be out."

"If it has to be out at those hours, I 'll take it out myself. If you try me too far, I 'll

Miss Cynthia's Treasures

sit up with you and sleep late mornings—as Judith does."

Judith laughed and stooped to kiss the flushed face under the nodding plumes. "Get my scarf," commanded Miss Cynthia, "and the other things."

With the delight of a child she spread forth her treasures for Carter's inspection—the net scarf, so heavy with silver spangles that Miss Cynthia's frail shoulders must bend a little under the burden of it; a tea-gown, in pinks and blues that would have allured a Pompadour; a lace fan, a bottle of perfume, a pair of black velvet slippers with rhinestone buckles, and a wonderful veil of white chiffon that seemed once to have been laid over roses—and remembered it.

"That 's good," said Carter, approving of the veil. "That means you 're coming out in the car."

"What?" demanded Miss Cynthia, with astonished eyes.

"That veil. That 's what it 's for, you know."

"It is n't," she denied. "It 's merely to protect my hat from the dampness when I sit out on the porch in the evening."

"Oh," he returned, sincerely disappointed. "Won't you come?"

"No, I won't."

"Aunt Belinda said she would n't, too,"

he went on, in wheedling tones, "but she did. Everybody does what I ask them to."

"Except me," she replied, pointedly. "Those people have spoiled you. Their life revolves about you as the earth about the sun."

"Am I not, in a way, the son of their household? Should n't life revolve about such as I?"

"It should n't," put in Judith, "but it does, and not only at Warners' either."

Without being asked, she went to her harp in the corner of the big room, swept the strings idly, then sat down to play. They were in the big living-room upstairs where Miss Cynthia spent most of her time. Breakfast and luncheon were served to her there, but at night she insisted upon going down to dinner, dressed as though for guests.

A screen concealed the cavernous fireplace at the end of the long room, but the candles on the mantel brought into vivid relief the stag's head upon the chimney-piece, moth-eaten, like many other things about the house. The floor was bare, with only a few small rugs scattered upon it. Fond of marine metaphors, Miss Cynthia alluded to it as a sea of floor dotted with islands of rug.

A cabinet in the corner held a few bits of bric-à-brac, but one whole side of the room was devoted to books. Opposite the books, four large windows, with a glass door between them,

Harmonies

opened out upon the balcony that ran along the side of the house and overlooked the garden. A door opposite the fireplace opened into Miss Cynthia's bedroom, which, in turn, opened out upon the front balcony by another door. Judith's two rooms were across the hall.

Carter drew a long breath of delight as Judith began to play. She was near the window and the moonlight shone full upon her face. The rest of the room was in shadow, save for the two candles that burned fitfully upon the mantel, flickering in the scented breeze that floated in from the garden.

Deep, vibrant chords broke out upon the stillness—full-toned harmonies that appealed to the soul of the man as Judith herself appealed. She wore white, as she usually chose to do, but there were crimson roses in her hair and at her belt, and, now and then, for an instant, the moonlight won an answering glow from the heart of the ruby that blazed in her betrothal ring.

For the thousandth time the man wondered how it happened that she loved him. During the year and more of their engagement, the miracle of it had not quite vanished. Continually she stirred him to new allegiance; she kept his blood on fire with ambition. To do, to achieve, to fight, to struggle, and to go on with fresh courage after every failure—these

aspirations came to him subtly, but none the less surely, from the woman he loved.

The last full chord sounded through the room, then, at length, even the echo ceased. Judith still had one hand upon her harp strings—the other had fallen at her side. She had turned her face away from the room and toward the moonlight. Exquisitely remote, as some far star, she seemed to have entered some fastness of her own soul, where no man might ever hope to follow.

"Judith!" His voice broke upon her name. She did not answer and he called again: "Judith!"

She turned, with a soft laugh. "Look, dear," she whispered, "Aunt Cynthia is asleep!"

Under the nodding plumes, indeed, the little figure was still. Judith went to her and touched her gently. "Come, dear, come!"

"Take it off," murmured Miss Cynthia, a little fretfully.

"Yes, I will. Come."

With her newly-acquired splendour almost hiding her face, Miss Cynthia sleepily bade Carter good-night. He had the grace not to remind her that she had threatened to sit up until very late. Presently Judith came back.

"Let 's go out on the balcony," she said, in a low tone, "then we shan't disturb her."

They tiptoed out and closed the door

Feathers and Eider-Down

quietly. "Oh, the night," breathed Judith; "the lovely, lovely night!"

"Darling," said Carter, "have we pillows?"

"Pillows!" repeated Judith, in amazement. "For what?"

"For us—for the house, you know. Does the bride buy 'em and have you?"

She laughed, but the full, deep tenderness of the undertone thrilled him. "Of course—long ago!"

"Feathers?" he queried.

"Indeed not," she rejoined, scornfully.

"What then?"

"Eider-down. Six, from Aunt Cynthia. It was her last extravagance but one. Why?"

"I 'm sorry, in a way," he answered, taking her into his arms. "I 'm going to have feathers, and I wanted to give 'em to you."

"Dear," murmured Judith, to his coat-collar, "you have n't the faintest idea how funny you are—nor how lovable."

"Come over here and tell me." He led her to the swinging seat at the end of the balcony, and they sat there, repeating the lover's litany with all its adorable nonsense, until, as Miss Cynthia said, "the moon got tired and went to bed," thus shaming them to the "sweet sorrow" of parting.

VI

The House of Hearts

IN the peace and quiet of Sunday afternoon, Chandler was reading aloud to Margery from the book Miss Cynthia had sent him. Subtly, his deep voice lured unsuspected harmonies from our prosaic English, and gave to the spoken word a melody wholly distinct from its meaning.

Accident and Essence

"It is we who do not understand, for that we never rise above the earth-level of our intellect. Let us but ascend to the first snows of the mountain, and all inequalities are levelled by the purifying hand of the horizon that opens before us. What difference, then, between a pronouncement of Marcus Aurelius and the words of a child complaining of the cold? Let us be humble and learn to distinguish between accident and essence. Let not 'sticks that float' cause us to forget the prodigies of the gulf. The most glorious thoughts and the most degraded ideas can no more ruffle the eternal surface of our soul than, amidst the stars of Heaven, Himalaya or precipice can alter the surface of the earth. A look, a kiss,

Lack of Interest

and the certainty of a great invisible presence: all is said, and I know that she who is by my side is my equal. . . ."

He paused and looked eagerly at Margery, expecting to find her face alight with response, but her blue eyes had a far-away look that chilled his own enthusiasm. She did not seem to notice that his voice had ceased. Pressing the tip of a rosy forefinger to her short upper lip, she politely, but ineffectually, endeavoured to smother a yawn.

Then she turned. "Surely that is n't the end of it?"

"Yes," lied Chandler, tactfully. "What more is there to be said?"

Margery did n't know, and said so, with a dreamy lack of interest or comprehension. Bees and yellow butterflies hovered above the drifts of clover across the road; an exquisite hint of honeysuckle came from afar. The new growth upon the cedars was vividly green, by contrast with the rest, and that, too, brought fragrance, though of another sort, when the wind came from the proper direction.

The little blue sailor, on the weather-vane at the cross-roads, spun around giddily that afternoon, perched above his golden arrow. Whether his seas of air were calm or tempestuous, whether the day brought warm rain or biting sleet, the jaunty tar faced fortune and misfortune alike, with the same serene smile.

Chandler had purposely chosen the sailor, though he wondered, at the time, if the parallel were not somewhat too obvious. However, only Judith had seen the likeness between the mariner, far inland, destined to abide where Fate had placed him until decay claimed him for its own, and Chandler, longing for life as may only those who are not in the thick of it, anchored by his wheeled chair.

She forebore to speak of it, though sometimes the mist softened her dark eyes when she saw Chandler watching the weather-vane, with wistful pain plainly mirrored upon his face. She guessed, too, that now and then, when the wind blew straight from the North and the figure faced the house, that the cheery smile brought a bit of comfort, painted though it was.

Just now the sailor's profile was turned toward the veranda where the two sat. One foot was upon the edge of the arrow; the other was poised in mid-air as though, with a brisk "Aye, aye, sir," in answer to a command, the little man had started forward and had upon the instant been overtaken by his destiny.

"Where did you get him?" asked Margery.

"I had him made."

"He 's cunning. I should think his clothes would wear out, though, being outdoors all the time."

"They do, but he 's more fortunate than the

The Happiest People

rest of us. All he requires is a fresh coat of paint, once in two years."

"I 'm glad I can have more than that," she laughed. "I love clothes—that is, pretty ones."

"So do I, Margery. I like to look at yours."

"And to button 'em?"

"And to button 'em."

"Everything I 've got either hooks or buttons down the back, so you 'll have plenty to do. Father used to say, once in a while, that he understood how the old man felt who committed suicide because he got 'so blamed tired of the eternal buttonin' and unbuttonin'.'"

"One might, for one's self," remarked Chandler, thoughtfully, "but the happiest people in the world are those who serve others rather than themselves. The more you give, the more you have; the more you take, without giving, the less you have that you can keep."

Margery was silent. Presently she put her finger to her lip again, then crimsoned with embarrassment at Chandler's comprehending smile.

"It 's a sleepy day," he said, kindly. "I 've often wondered whether Sundays were really longer than other days or whether they only seem so."

"I guess they 're longer," she murmured.

"I think so. If I did n't have you to look at, I believe I 'd go to sleep."

"I can go upstairs," she suggested, "or out for a walk."

"Better take a walk. Algernon must need exercise. Would you mind getting me a pillow?"

When she had brought it, Chandler leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, simulating slumber until Margery had turned the corner at the cross-roads and the beaming little sailor had swiftly spun around on his high perch to follow her with his eyes.

"I don't blame you, old man," muttered Chandler, "but she's free, and you and I are fixtures."

Child-hunger burned in his blood for an instant, then mercifully died out. Margery's mere presence in his house brought to him, with poignant pain that yet had in it a hint of sweetness, the realisation of all he had missed. The sound of her step upon the stair, the turn of her rounded arm, the rustle of her skirts, the dimple at her bare elbow, the music of her rare laughter, the indefinable fragrance that surrounded her like an invisible garment—all these meant to him, not Margery, but Woman incarnate.

"To bear man in agony," he thought; "to nourish him at her breast, to teach him most of the good that he ever learns, to give herself to him through love of him, to wait, to pray, to beckon him upward; for ever giving,

Memory of The Hour

sacrificing yielding—and what under high Heaven do we ever give her back?"

Restlessly, he turned to the book again. Dear little Margery—of course she could not understand!

"Of the true, predestined love alone," he read, "do I speak here. When Fate sends forth the woman it has chosen for us,—sends her forth from the fastnesses of the great spiritual cities in which we, all unconsciously, dwell, and she awaits us at the crossing of the road we have to traverse when the hour is come—we are warned at the first glance. Some there are who attempt to force the hand of Fate. Wildly pressing down their eyelids, so as not to see that which had to be seen—struggling with all their puny strength against the eternal forces—they will contrive perhaps to cross the road and go toward another, sent thither, but not for them."

Miss Cynthia had not marked the passage, but Chandler enclosed it in pencilled brackets. Later on, he heavily underlined this:

"May it not be during one of those profound moments, when his head is pillowed on a woman's breast, that the hero learns to know the strength and steadfastness of his star?"

Instantly, The Hour came back—vividly alive, as though it were yesterday. Across the grey web of the intervening years, it moved majestically, as upon wings of flame. Pierced

Margery's Stroll

through and through with torture, as it had been, when his every sense had been exquisitely alive to its own hurt, The Hour had yet brought him a certain divine ecstasy.

It thrilled his soul even now—mysteriously it summoned, like a bugle-call. The heights to which it bade him were shrouded in mist and inaccessible, but the dweller in the valley, whose spiritual vision has, for a moment of rapture, encompassed the region of the high gods, must for ever keep his face turned upward, waiting, and even praying, for the blinding light.

Margery had gone down the road that led to the river, humming to herself the fragment of an old song. Algernon gambolled after her, keeping his balance as well as he might upon unsteady feet that were too large for the rest of him. With his nose to the warm earth, he sniffed appreciatively at the tempting trail of chipmunk and squirrel, but did not fail to follow faithfully the small heels of the Adorable One in blue.

She carried no parasol, yet dragged her hat carelessly by its flopping brim, not in the least annoyed by the fact that its wreath of pink-and-white clover had become loosened and was perilously near the dust. It bobbed fantastically in front of Algernon, but he never managed to overtake it, though it seemed as if it might be a pleasant thing for a puppy to chew upon.

The Puppy and a Bumble-Bee

At the river-bank, Margery paused. One path led along the stream; the other wound around the foot of the fateful hill. The mere memory of that fence made her shudder. Algernon, having an inquiring disposition, investigated a clover blossom to which a bumble-bee was clinging, then swiftly repented in piercing wails.

"Oh," said Margery, softly. "Poor little doggie! Come here!" Digging her heels into the soft earth, she descended the river-bank, with the whining puppy following her, scooped up a handful of soft mud, and plastered it over the injured nose. "There! Just breathe through your mouth a little while and you 'll be all right." Algernon proceeded to breathe through his mouth, as requested. Indeed, he had to, if he breathed at all, for Margery had been generous with her mother earth.

She washed her hands, and, in the care-free manner of the young, wiped them upon her lace-trimmed petticoat. She sat down under a tree, thinking as she did so that she was just where she had been a little over a week ago with Judith. As she watched the placid river, rippling peacefully toward the lake below, she remembered the rose-petals, and began to wonder about The Prince.

"She 's found hers," she mused, idly, remembering what Chandler had said about

A Discovery

Judith's approaching marriage. It was Mr. Keith who had given her the dog. He had seemed so much taller and older than Margery that she had been the least bit afraid of him—until he spoke.

"I suppose that big ruby is her engagement ring," she thought. "I wonder why he did n't give her a diamond!" Then she added to herself, with sudden feminine perception, "I guess she 'd rather have the ruby—it 's more like her, someway."

Algernon was sitting close to Margery with his tongue hanging out. He was breathing painfully, but he had ceased to whine. "Bad boy," she said, reprovingly, "that 's what you get for being curious. Come along now, and forget about it."

Much chastened in manner, he toddled after her, along the road which led around the base of the hill. Presently she came to a bit of level ground. "Upon my word," said Margery, to herself, "if there is n't a new house! Who 'd think anyone would be building here! We 'll investigate it, Algernon—I love new houses, don't you?"

Evidently Algernon did, though he had to be assisted up the four or five rude steps which led into the bungalow. It was made of cement, with a green tiled roof, and all the outside woodwork painted the same soft green. The plastering was done and the floors were laid,

Margery Explores the New House

so she could easily imagine what the house would be like when it was finished.

There was a large living-room, which opened out upon the veranda, and a small room off the living-room which she shrewdly supposed would be someone's den. A big stone fireplace took up almost the entire end of the largest room, and a space was marked off at either side for seats, to make an inglenook. "I suppose the lids of the seats will come up," she thought, "and they'll keep the coal and wood for the fire in 'em—that's what I'd do."

Separated from the rest of the house by a narrow hall was a suite which was evidently a bedroom and two dressing-rooms. Each of the dressing-rooms had a bath opening from it and the larger and sunnier of the two dressing-rooms had a huge closet in it.

"Oh, my," said Margery, to herself. "That'll be her closet, whoever she is. Lucky woman! Come on, Algernon, let's find the dining-room and kitchen."

Absorbed in the dining-room, the suite which was evidently for a guest, being connected with the den by another hall, and mildly interested in the kitchen and pantry, Margery did not hear the purr of an approaching automobile that, with a final wheeze, paused at the entrance. When she heard voices in the house, she was at first frightened, then confused. Of course it would be the

Last Things

people who owned the house—or curious passers-by like herself.

"Rather awkward," she thought, "even at the best. I 'll have to go through the living-room, and they 're right in it."

Remembering her unhappy experience upon the hill, she did not attempt the jump that would have landed her in the sand outside the kitchen door, where, as yet, there were no steps. "I 'd break my ankle if I did it," she continued, to herself, "and have to be carried home. Come on, doggie!"

The voices had ceased in the living-room. Carter had taken Judith into his arms with a half-whispered: "Please, Princess—kiss me!" And Judith had yielded, in impassioned answer, never guessing that this one supreme moment was to mark the end of her absolute faith in him.

How seldom do we recognise the "last things," as they confront us! Could we know, as we nod carelessly to a passing friend, that our eyes are never to look into his again, would we not pause for an instant to say farewell? That final handclasp—would it not be closer? That last letter—would it not be less hastily written? That last embrace, that last kiss—oh, ye who love us, how the tears would choke us as we tried to say "good-bye!"

Judith broke away from him, her face flaming. Margery stood in the open door, smiling

The First Visitor

because she saw friends instead of strangers. Carter turned, laughed, a little awkwardly, then Judith, with her shamed eyes seeking his, saw a look there that she had never seen before. His face seemed subtly to change; it was not Carter, but another man whom she did not know—and never would know. As quickly as it had come, it passed.

Judith was the first to speak. "We came over to measure for curtains," she said, in her cool, high-bred voice.

"Oh," returned Margery. "Is it your house?"

"Yes," answered Carter, clearing his throat. "Our house." He smiled at Judith as he spoke, but her heart was still cold with the prescience of impending catastrophe.

"It 's lovely to find you here," she went on, striving valiantly for self-possession. "You 're our first visitor—is n't she, Carter?"

He nodded and turned away, toward the fireplace.

"Come," said Judith. "Let me show it to you." Trembling a little, she pointed out the door leading to the veranda, explained the plan for the inglenook, indicated Carter's den, then took her back through the hall to the sunny side of the house.

"This is—" she hesitated, and her high colour came back—"our room. We each have a dressing-room and bath and I have a

Margery and Carter

perfectly tremendous closet, big enough for two trunks. One dressing-room will be pink and the other blue, but this room is to be as white as the driven snow—furniture, woodwork, wall, draperies, rugs, everything. Not even a hint of colour, nor a picture—only a few casts and perhaps a plaster bas-relief, ivory-tinted for contrast. I 've wanted a white floor, waxed, but it does n't seem practical, and tile is too cold, and too much like a hospital, so I 'm going to cover it with white rugs."

"It will be lovely," said Margery, politely, but without enthusiasm.

"I think so. Did you see the dining-room?"

"Yes. I 've been all through the house."

"Then will you excuse me while I measure these windows? It won't take long."

"Certainly."

Margery went back into the living-room, where Carter still stood, moodily looking into the empty fireplace. "Your dog's nose is—well, soiled," he said, without looking around.

"A bee stung him and so I put mud on his nose."

"Perhaps the sting is still there. If so, it will have to be taken out."

"Mr. Chandler will take it out. I think he can."

"If he can't, I will."

"You 're very kind," returned Margery, politely. She sauntered out upon the ve-

How the House Was Named

randa. Carter followed her, at a respectful distance.

"Do you still call him 'Algernon'?"

"Yes. 'Nonny' for short."

"That 's better—I don't like 'Algernon.'"

"I did n't either. That 's why I named him that—he was such an abominable little beast at first. But since I 've grown fond of him, the name seems nice, too."

Margery smiled as she spoke—a little girlish smile, full of the winsome innocence of youth. Just then Judith appeared.

"We were talking about the dog's name," Margery continued. "He 's still Algernon and it seems as though it were going to stay by him until the bitter end."

"Why bitter?" queried Carter.

"A dog's life is a phrase that implies bitterness," Judith suggested.

"Have you named your house?" asked Margery.

"Yes." Judith's dark eyes kindled in answer to some inner flame. "We call it 'The House of Hearts.'"

"It 's cunning—but why?"

"From a bit of verse we happened to read together the day we began to plan it:

"Little sunset House of Hearts
Standing all alone,
I could come and sweep the leaves
From your stepping stone."

Impending Change

Her full, deep contralto lingered lovingly upon the words. Her voice had a peculiar, throaty quality that sometimes reminded Carter of a 'cello.

"Shall we go now?" he asked, of Judith.

"Yes. Won't you come with us, Margery, and stay to tea? We 'd love to have you."

"Thank you, but I must n't. Mr. Chandler will be lonely without me."

"So shall we," responded Carter, consciously gallant.

"Yes, but he 's lame. If it is n't out of your way, will you take me home?"

"With pleasure."

Judith and Margery took the back seat and talked commonplaces until they came to the little house at the cross-roads. When Margery got out, Judith followed her, and took the front seat beside Carter. They waved a good-bye to Margery, then Carter turned to Judith with the old, loving smile, as they started off.

Apparently, all was as before, yet Judith spent a wakeful night in wonder—and fear. She had the sense of impending change.

Carter slept soundly, as was his wont, but he dreamed of The House of Hearts, for the first time with no Judith in it. Instead, it was full of Margerys, in blue gowns and clover-trimmed hats, smiling at him from every room, framed in every doorway, bidding his reluctant feet

When Carter Awoke

to follow wherever they chose to lead. When he woke, the sun was shining, but it took the splash of cool water upon his face to banish the phantoms of the night and bring back the clear, sane facts of everyday.

VII

"Woman's Work"

Plans for the Day

"WHAT were you layin' out to do to-day, Father?"

"Nothin'. I thought maybe after a while I 'd tinker a spell, but I don't feel to do nothin' right now."

Aunt Belinda's smooth forehead contracted into a frown. She came out on the porch with a pan full of peas, sat down in her low rocker, and began to shell them.

"Why?" demanded Uncle Henry, in swift defence against the implied reproach.

"Seems to me you might be doin' somethin'. I work all day, week days and Sundays, and you set and set."

"I don't, neither. Don't I milk the cow and take care of the horse and feed the pigs and keep his ottymobile shined up? If you think that ain't work, you 'd better try it."

"I will," rejoined Aunt Belinda, with ill-concealed sarcasm. "After I get the beds made and the dishes washed and the house swept and dusted and his litter picked up from all over upstairs and the rabbits and pigeons

Changing Places

and chickens and dogs fed and the wash counted, I 'll shine up the ottymobile. I 'd admire to do it."

"Pshaw!" grunted the old man. "You ain't got nothin' to do. That is," he added, hastily, "nothin' much."

"Lemme change places with you," she suggested. "Mornin's I 'll wake you up and ask you if it ain't most time for breakfast. After you get up, I 'll have another nap, then I 'll dress myself and come out and eat. If I want more sausages or more pancakes, you 'll fry 'em for me, and after him and me get through with our breakfast, you can set down and have yours while I look at the paper.

"Then I 'll go out and walk round in the sun for a spell, set down and milk the cow, brush up the horse, and get him some oats, then come back and set on the porch. Meanwhile you 'll be clearin' off the table and washin' the dishes and straightenin' up the kitchen, then, after you 've made the beds, and swept and dusted the house, you c'n come out and set on the porch till I 've got rested enough from combin' the horse to eat again.

"You c'n get me a nice dinner and after I 've et it, I 'll go in the settin' room and lie down and take a little nap while you 're washin' up the dishes and settin' the table for supper. After you get through, and ready to rest an hour or so, I 'll go down to the post-

How Things Are Divided

office and talk politics with the lazy loafers settin' around on soap-boxes and explainin' how the country is goin' to the dogs and the President ain't never done nothin' that 's right. After I 've come back and rested from my walk, I 'll look at the ottymobile and if it needs wipin', I 'll wipe it. By that time I 'll be hungry again and you c'n have my supper ready. After I 've et it, I 'll set on the porch while you wash the dishes and after you get 'em done, it 'll be time for me to go to bed."

"La sakes, Mother, how you do take on! All that ain't nothin' but woman's work. It don't amount to shucks."

"Woman's work!" snorted Aunt Belinda. The dull colour rose to the roots of her hair. "Who made it 'woman's work'?"

"God did," returned Uncle Henry, piously. He had the air of one imparting information to an inquiring child.

"Hump! You 'd better say the Evil One did it and not be layin' it to Providence. You 'd come a heap sight nearer the truth!"

"Men works outside the house and women works inside it," resumed Uncle Henry, after a thoughtful interval. "Things is divided up equal."

"I ain't seen it so," she retorted. "I ain't never seen a man yet that was willin' to do what a woman would call a good day's work. Ain't I lived on a farm? Don't I know?"

The harvestin'

"But the harvestin', Belinda—don't you recall that?"

"Yes," she returned, pointedly, "I recall it. I recall gettin' up at four in the mornin' and gettin' breakfast for the hands. I recall spendin' the mornin' gettin' dinner for the hands, the afternoon washin' up and gettin' supper for the hands, and the evenin' washin' up while the hands sets outside and tells how hard they 've worked. I recall the big kettle full of pancake batter, the preservin' kettle full of doughnuts, and the barrel of cider on the porch, some bein' carried to the hands about ten in the mornin' as they toiled in the fields. I recall the whole hams and the loaves of bread and the wash-boiler full of potatoes. I 've peeled so many potatoes in my time that it 's a wonder I ain't ashamed to look one of 'em in the eye."

Uncle Henry laughed with the assumption of heartiness, but she refused to be mollified.

"You can't tell me nothin' about the harvestin', for I know it all, backwards and forwards. A man 'll set on a plough and let a horse drag him around a field all day and come back and tell the women folks how hard he 's worked. And the reapin' and the makin' hay—I 've seen a man pile up just enough hay to make a nice bed for himself, and pull his hat over his eyes and lay down and go to sleep till it 's time for the next meal."

"I was sick that day, Belinda, and besides, I had n't been layin' down more 'n a minute or two when you come and woke me up."

"If I had n't woke you up, we would n't have had any hay that year. There was a black cloud the size of the Baptist Church comin' as fast as it could."

"But it did n't rain, Belinda," he returned, plaintively.

"'T wa'n't my fault it passed over."

"No," he said, earnestly, "I reckon not. It was more 'n fifteen years ago that I laid down in my own hay-field to rest for a spell because I was sick and you ain't through remindin' me of it yet. 'T ain't no crime, as I see. And if you could have made it rain, you would 'uv."

"We 'd had a terrible dry spell," she said, half to herself.

"I reckon I know the weather as well as anybody does, and if it 'd been goin' to rain, I would n't 'uv laid down, sick as I was. Havin' a wife to take care of, I 'd 'uv kept up."

Aunt Belinda emptied the shelled peas out of her apron into the pan at her side. She stared at him over the steel rim of her spectacles. Her jaw had dropped and her mouth was wide open, but no speech came forth—undoubtedly because no speech at her command seemed adequate.

"What about him?" demanded Uncle Henry, hastily changing the subject. "I ain't heard

Relatives by Marriage

you criticise him for not workin', and he 's got the easiest time of anybody I ever knew. I 've been in his office and there ain't nothin' in it but a bookcase and a couple of desks and one of them machines that writes letters. He 's even got a woman to run that for him. Mornin's he sets there and tells her what to write and she writes it, and afternoons he just talks to people. Do you call that workin'?"

"He ain't my own flesh and blood."

"Neither am I. I 'm nothin' but a relative by marriage."

"Relatives by marriage are the most tryin' of any of 'em," she observed, "and that 's sayin' a pile. If there 's anythin' on earth that can be more tryin' than any kind of a relative, I don't know what it is, but relatives by marriage comes first—easy."

Uncle Henry cleared his throat and turned restlessly in his chair. Then he began to twirl his thumbs—a sure sign of mental agitation. The wife of his bosom sat very erect with a spot of bright colour upon either cheek. She bristled, as it were, with resentment.

"As I was sayin'," she went on, "he ain't my own flesh and blood nor even a relative by marriage. As long as he pays his board regular, 'tain't none of my business so long as I have reason to believe he come by it honest. Except for combin' the horse and milkin' the cow, he ain't got it no easier than you have.

Just Quotin'

La me," she sighed. "I wish I did n't have nothin' to do but to go down-town into a nice office every day and put my feet up on a desk, and say——"

"Belinda!" interrupted Uncle Henry, in amazement.

"I was just quotin', that is, I was just goin' to quote, from you and from him. Don't you remember the day you and him was buildin' the pigeon-house and kept hittin' your thumbs instead of the nails you was drivin' at? And the day his puppy fell off a chair into a pail of milk and drownded itself and ruined the milk so 's it had to be fed to the pigs? I was privileged to be settin' down in the kitchen for a few minutes while I was pittin' cherries for a pie and to hear the language that was spoke on my porch by both of you."

"I ain't makin' no remarks about your quotations. I was wonderin' how any modest, decent woman could want to put her feet on a man's desk."

"I did n't say I wanted to. I said I wished I did n't have nothin' to do but that. Can't you hear straight? If you can't, you 'd better buy yourself an ear-trumpet."

"Don't want no ear-trumpet," murmured Uncle Henry, sadly. "I hear enough as 't is—more 'n enough, sometimes."

The peas rattled into the pan. The fresh, pungent odour of the pods came gratefully to

A Pretty Sight

his nostrils. A blue pigeon, its iridescent neck gleaming in the sun, fluttered down to the sunken tile for a drink of cool water. In the distance the chickens clucked cheerfully.

"Speakin' of relatives," resumed Aunt Belinda, with a sigh, "and more especially of relatives by marriage, there ain't nothin' that can be as exasperatin' as a husband—without half tryin'. 'Tain't no trouble to 'em at all, and likewise, 'tain't no trouble to 'em to be decent."

The shaft glanced aside, harmlessly. Uncle Henry was watching the pigeon. "If there 's any prettier sight on earth than a bird drinkin'," he mused, "I don't know what it is. I mind me of the time you and me was drivin' to Jonesville in the Spring, when all the fruit trees was in blossom, and there was a pair of redbirds buildin' their nest in a crab-tree by the road. I can see their wings now, in the green and the white, and smell the apple blossoms and hear 'em makin' love to each other, not singin' much, but just chirpin'. We could n't understand what they was sayin', but they could. I reckon it all means the same thing as a man takin' a woman into his arms and whisperin' to her that he loves her."

"I reckon it does," replied Aunt Belinda, softly.

"And when we was comin' back, there was the same two birds. She was settin' on a stone

Uncle Henry Resigned

in the brook, drinkin', and throwin' her pretty head back like she was givin' thanks for every drop of the cool water. And he was settin' up in the apple blossoms, with his head on one side, singin' to her. And while we was watchin,' she come back to him and they went into the apple blossoms together. Seems a'most as if 't was yesterday."

"Yes," sighed the old wife. "It does."

There was a long silence. The pigeon flew away and a pair of white ones came to the deep, cool pool in the grass, cooing to one another while they drank—shy, half-murmured notes of the world's great love-song that sounded through the hills and valleys, and to which even the worms in the earth must answer because it was June.

"If you want me to work," resumed Uncle Henry, with an air of patient resignation, "I c'n take the kitchen clock apart and put it together again. I ain't done it for quite a spell now and it don't seem to me it strikes as brisk as it did."

"No, Henry, the clock strikes plenty brisk enough for me. You can carry these pods to the chickens, if you like, and then feed the pigeons, and I 'll get dinner. After you 've had your afternoon nap, if you don't mind, I wish you 'd hitch up and take me over to Miss Bancroft's. I want her receipt for puttin' up strawberries and that puddin' he

Trials

had there the other night that he was tellin' me about."

"All right, Belinda." Then he asked, with fresh interest: "What are we goin' to have for dinner?"

"Salt pork with cream gravy and boiled potatoes and these peas. I thought mebbe I might stir up a few pancakes and put 'em together with jell and sprinkle some powdered sugar on top. I ain't used up all of last year's jell yet."

A pleased expression settled down upon Uncle Henry's face, destined to abide there until it was time to hitch up the horse. Obediently he took the pan of pods and started toward the chicken-yard. Aunt Belinda took off her spectacles and wiped her eyes.

"He *is* tryin'," she thought, "but I reckon the Lord meant for us to have our trials mixed up in everythin' instead of comin' separate. Anyway, I ain't heathen enough to think any of us gets things that ain't meant."

When he returned, with the empty pan, she was singing "Rock of Ages" in a quavering soprano which scarcely made the composer's intention evident, but had a cheery sound, nevertheless. Uncle Henry filled the pan with the corn which Carter bought already shelled, to save trouble, and dragged his chair to the edge of the porch. When the first handful of corn struck the brown earth, around the

The Carrier-Pigeon

steps, a cloud of pigeons descended with a pleasant rush and flutter. They conversed loudly in their own language as they ate and Uncle Henry shrewdly surmised that they were expressing gratitude for the kindness that provided corn so generously at regular hours. "That's about all they could be sayin'," he thought, "except that it 's a nice day and that they 're much obliged for the water."

The carrier-pigeon held himself a little apart from the rest. He ate less greedily and seemed scarcely to notice the varied murmur around him. As a great man in a crowd, he chose to be solitary in spite of it and to commune with his inner self, rather than with his fellows.

He was a young bird but he was learning that at sunrise he must go to his master's window and wait, cooing upon the sill, till the window was opened and a message tied under his wing. Then he must go East, as the morning itself went, over the dusty road where the ferns and wild roses were thickest, across the river, through the valley, and above a field of clover to the big white house surrounded by a box hedge that breathed pungent odours afar. The other window was upon the shady side of the house. Here, too, he must coo and tap upon the screen with his bill until a woman's hand, upon which a ruby glowed, reached out from a filmy mass of lace and

Content-ment

brought him corn. When the message had been taken from him and another put in its place, he must retrace his flight to the window from whence he started, where again there would be corn.

Having these things to muse upon, should not a bird separate himself from the common flock, to consider the mysterious workings of destiny, and to observe the precise payment that followed labour well done? He was the first to fly away, after he had eaten and drunk to his satisfaction. The others followed shortly, though corn was still sprinkled upon the ground—not even a pigeon went hungry from Uncle Henry's door.

"Dinner!" called Aunt Belinda, from the savoury recesses of the kitchen, and Uncle Henry went in, his face wreathed in smiles, to greet her with the fond look which men bestow upon women about to offer them food.

Filled with the same sort of content that diffused itself among the pigeons, he lay down, after dinner, for his "forty winks," while she washed the dishes and put the kitchen into the perfect order which secretly delighted her housewifely soul.

While he was hitching the old sorrel horse to the dilapidated buggy, she changed her blue calico gown for a fresh black-and-white percale and locked up the house as carefully as if they were going to Europe for six months.

Aunt Belinda Calls on Miss Cynthia

"You had n't intended me to go to Miss Bancroft's with you, had you, Mother?" he asked, as they started.

"No. You c'n drive back to the post-office and get my magazine and a couple of stamps. I 've been meanin' to write some letters all the week but I 've been so driv' I ain't got round to it. You come back for me in an hour and mebbe we 'll drive a spell—it 's such a pretty day."

"All right, Mother." He was so glad that he was not to be taken to Miss Bancroft's that his burden seemed light indeed. He was not, as he now and then remarked, "a visitin' man."

"It 's a comfort to go and see lame folks," Aunt Belinda said, as they stopped in front of the big white house. "You know before you go in that they 're home—they ain't gaddin'." None the less, she politely made the usual inquiry of the maid who opened the door.

"Yes'm. Miss Judith is home, too. I guess they 'd want you to go right up."

The two were in the shady corner of the upper balcony. Judith was embroidering her wedding gown and Miss Cynthia was reading aloud from a book which she instantly dropped when Mrs. Warner appeared.

"This is lovely of you," said Miss Cynthia, kindly, offering her hand. "You 'll excuse my not rising?"

The Desired Recipe

"Certainly. How do you do?"

With a bow to Judith, she sank into the offered chair. "Henry had some errands to the postoffice, so I said I 'd come here for a spell. I wanted to see you both and find out how you make your strawberry jam and that puddin' you had the other Sunday for dinner. He ain't got through talkin' about that puddin'."

"You 're spoiling him, Mrs. Warner," laughed Judith. "I 'm afraid I won't be able to live with him."

"Any time you can't," rejoined Aunt Belinda, meaningly, "you c'n just send him back to us. Me and Henry can live with him all right."

Sufficiently rebuked, Judith disappeared in search of the desired recipe. "As for the strawberries," said Miss Cynthia, "all you have to do is to measure the berries, cover them with an equal measure of sugar, and let them stand over night in a cool place. In the morning, let them cook very slowly until the sirup is thick and the berries are plump, then seal as usual."

"That sounds easy. I reckon I can remember that. He says he never et such preserves."

"He," returned Miss Cynthia, with slightly sarcastic emphasis, "is very kind to praise."

Aunt Belinda bristled inwardly for a moment,

Surprise

waiting to pounce upon Miss Cynthia should reflections be made upon Carter, but nothing more was said until Judith came back with a neat copy of the receipt.

"Thank you. I 'll just put it in my bag and he can have it for his supper to-morrow night. Don't say nothin' to him about it—I want him to be surprised."

"Surprise," said Miss Cynthia, philosophically, "is the essential weapon of the feminine equipment. After a man has learned to love a woman, all she needs to do is to keep him surprised. She need not be unpleasant, but she must be unexpected."

This was too deep for the visitor, but Judith smiled approvingly. Not to be left at the post and to get safely back on familiar ground, Aunt Belinda harked back to the earlier hours of the day.

"Me and Henry was havin' a discussion this mornin', about woman's work—what 't is and what it ought to be."

"Woman's work," commented Miss Cynthia, "is anything a man can make her do."

"Oh, Aunt Cynthia," laughed Judith. "Don't be so cynical!"

"I 'm not. Have you ever seen a man carry a burden when there were woman's shoulders near enough to shift it to?"

"Henry brings in the wood," murmured Aunt Belinda, "and the milk, and before we

Discussing Carter

got the sink put in the kitchen he always brought in the water."

"I 'm not speaking of material things," Miss Cynthia explained. "Man's strength is physical and woman's moral. The superiority of each has come through constant use."

"Henry is moral," observed Aunt Belinda, somewhat resentfully, "and so is he."

"'He' meaning Carter?" asked Miss Cynthia, with her dark eyes flashing wickedly. Aunt Belinda nodded.

"I have n't a doubt of it. Of course I don't know Mr. Warner very well, but I do know Carter, and I can assure you that he is absolutely moral and upright—a person to be respected. In fact, he 's almost too good to be true."

When the visitor had driven away, Judith came to Miss Cynthia's chair and knelt by it. "Dear," she said, softly, "are n't you ashamed?"

"Of what?"

"Tormenting that dear, innocent old lady! Are n't you sorry?"

Miss Cynthia softened. "Perhaps, a little —but I have n't much amusement, you know."

"Save your sharp arrows for Carter and me —don't waste them on her. She 's as devoted to him as his own mother might be, and you only hurt her. He 's like an only child to her."

"Yes," returned Miss Cynthia, with a vigorous nod of assent. "You just wait until you get to living with that only child and you 'll see what vicarious maternal devotion has done for him. I 've often wondered if the mothers of only sons don't smile a little bit when girls take 'em away from 'em. They know what they 've let the girls in for."

"Dearest, you 're awfully cross this afternoon. Won't you have a cup of tea?"

"I believe I will. Have it made very strong, please, and to-night I 'll sit up with you and the one god-like human being in whom there is no flaw."

Sustained by "the cup that cheers," Miss Cynthia was soon in a happier mood, and talked clothes with Judith, in the normal feminine manner, until almost dinner-time.

VIII

The Lure of the City

Frankly Bored

GRADUALLY, Margery became restless and unhappy. The novelty of her surroundings had worn off and the day hung heavily upon her hands. Her eyes drooped from oversleeping, for, frankly bored, she added to her long night's slumber a daily nap.

Chandler was troubled, seeing that his pretty butterfly was beating her wings in vain upon the bars of circumstance. Wisely, he would have offered her freedom, but it seemed impossible, in a way, and moreover, she had no other place to go.

Margery's mother had died in giving birth to her only child, so, never having had a mother, she had not felt the lack. Her father had striven manfully to fulfil a double duty, but, dying at forty-five, he had left his little girl just as she would need him most.

In his last hours, he had remembered Chandler, the friend of his youth. The two had not met for many years, though they had kept up a correspondence of the desultory sort. At long intervals, since the accident that had

Margery without Resources

crippled Chandler, Gordon had gone to spend a day or two with him, but, as it happened, he had never taken Margery along.

The pathetic droop of Margery's shoulders, the wistfulness of her eyes, and the sadness of her mouth went straight to Chandler's heart. In vain had he offered her the treasures of his library, for Margery was not particularly interested in books. He played to her, but without accompaniment, for Margery's fond parent had spared her the arduous hours at the piano which seem to be considered a necessary part of a girl's equipment.

"No," she had answered, when Chandler asked her if she played. "I never cared to learn, so Father did n't make me. He said that it was very common for a woman not to be able to play the piano, but it was a mark of distinction for her to know that she could n't."

"It sounds just like him," Chandler mused, smiling to himself.

"Father said he did n't know why everybody had to have a piano," Margery continued. "He said cornets were cheaper and made more noise, and, if anything, annoyed the neighbours more terribly. He said he thought that except in the case of very great artists the pleasure of music was all for the one who did it, and that he and I must be unselfish if we would seem distinguished in a selfish world."

"Apparently, he was n't musical."

Billy Gordon

"He said he was. We always used to go to the opera and good concerts. He told me once that the more musical people were, the less they would play themselves."

Billy Gordon's calm blue eyes looked up at Chandler from Margery's winsome face. Sometimes, during wakeful hours of the night, Chandler tried to imagine Margery's mother; to reconstruct, as it were, from father and daughter, the third member of the group. He supposed Margery had a picture somewhere, but he had not asked to see it.

Gordon had seldom spoken of his dead wife, even to Chandler. Once, when he had dwelt humorously and at some length upon the difficulties that beset the path of a man with a small daughter, with nothing to guide him except a few books upon Child-Training, written, in most cases, by the childless, Chandler had asked, idly:

"Why don't you marry again?"

"Marry again!" Gordon had repeated, incredulously. "Why man, you don't know what you're talking about. How could I want to marry again, and how could I do it if I did?"

To this there seemed no answer, though Chandler had trembled for a moment upon the verge of a confidence. No one knew of his one brief splendid hour save the woman who had shared it with him, and she——

Growth of Emotions

From the fact that she must still exist, somewhere, Chandler took a melancholy sort of comfort. The beautiful body of her might have gone back to the earth from which it was made; that which once housed her might be wind or grass or sea, but the divine essence which was herself, having taken on the immortality of love, abided with him still.

"Some people," Gordon had said, later in the conversation, "never grow, emotionally. If a man's body stops growing, he 's a dwarf, if his mind ceases to expand, he 's a simpleton, but we never take account of his soul. I have a friend, physically magnificent, who combines within himself the intellect of a philosopher, the diplomacy of a statesman, the executive ability of the general of an army, the courtesy of a Chesterfield—and the emotions of a rabbit."

Chandler reminded him that Darwin had observed and classified some sixty canine emotions expressed by the bark, and Billy Gordon had looked at him just as Margery was looking at him that minute, nodded, and replied, "Precisely, just so."

"Margery," said Chandler, suddenly, "has Algernon a soul?"

The girl came to herself with a start. Her thoughts, too, had been far away.

"What? I did n't understand."

"Has Algernon a soul?"

Billy's Theories

"Of course. Does n't he love me?"

"Unquestionably, but does love prove the existence of a soul?"

"Does n't it?" queried Margery, chiefly because she could think of nothing else to say.

Chandler was silent for a few moments, then he asked again: "Does Algernon reason, or does a given condition, acting upon an inherited structure, produce——"

Margery turned pained eyes to his. "I beg your pardon," he laughed; "I was merely thinking aloud."

"I don't know," she murmured. "Father said I should n't learn anything I did n't want to learn, and so I have n't."

"Exactly." It would have been like Billy Gordon to let his daughter educate herself as she chose. He had theories, indeed, about the mind choosing the food it required and discarding the rest.

"I 'm sorry," Margery resumed. "Father used to say that a woman should be lovable rather than intelligent."

"But you 're both, dear child. Just because you have n't burdened yourself with a set of useless facts is no sign you could n't if you wanted to."

Somewhat mollified, Margery smiled at him, winningly. It brought Chandler a new respect for his dead friend's discernment. Gifted with a smile like that, Margery would not need

A Suggestion

to know where the moon rose, the binomial theorem, or what made the tide come in, only to go out again.

She tapped the veranda restlessly with a small foot, and, though it was not yet noon, yawned—unmistakably and openly.

"Why don't you go to town?" he asked, after a pause.

"What for?" she asked, but she brightened, nevertheless.

"Oh, to shop. Haven't women always shopping to do?"

The suggestion appealed to Margery instantly. It had not occurred to her, since she came, that an hour on the train would take her back into familiar haunts. She rose to the lure of shop-windows, of long counters laden with fabrics from all over the world. Streams of ribbons, rows upon rows of perfumes, a wilderness of hats—yes, Margery would go to town!

"Is there anything you want? Can I get anything for you?"

"Surely. I always want books, but Judith or Carter usually buy them for me. I have a list, though, and if it isn't too much trouble to have them charged and sent out——"

"No trouble at all, and if there's anything else——"

"There is n't."

His answer was unheeded, for Margery was

Margery Goes to Town

already half-way upstairs, wondering where she put her time-table and what hat would look best with the pongee tailored gown she had not had an opportunity to wear. When she came down, flushed, eager, and smiling under the clover-wreath that nodded upon her hat, she had only time to take the list from Chandler's outstretched hand and hurry to the station as she had not hurried since she left town.

The noise of the train was refreshing and the pungent smell of smoke came not ungratefully to the small nose accustomed now to clover blossoms, cedar breaths, and the dim, far fragrance of the hay-fields. The smooth pavements enticed her feet, and the sun, flashing upon the many-windowed cliffs along the street, brought an answering light into her face. The elbows that jostled against hers seemed friendly, strange though they were. She beamed at her reflection when an occasional mirror offered it, and smiled happily at other girls who only stared at her.

First, she bought the books upon Chandler's list—all but one, which would be sent later; then, like a gypsy of the town back at last on well-known roads, threaded the mazes of shop and street with an unerring instinct toward the prettiest—and most expensive—things.

Impatient of slow deliveries, she annexed one small parcel after another, saying, mechanically,

A Friendly Voice

at the time of each purchase, "No, thank you, I 'll take it." Finding herself hungry, she went to a tea-room for salad and ice-cream—the usual luncheon of the woman who pauses in the midst of a hard day's work in shops. All the afternoon she drifted from one thing to another, now and then acquiring another bundle. At five o'clock, she betook herself to the station, and sat down to wait for the next train, having just missed one.

"Patent leathers *are* hot," she thought. "Wonder if anybody would see me if I took 'em off!"

She slipped her small feet out of her pumps, carefully spreading her skirts around them. Just as she had settled herself comfortably to rest, a friendly voice sounded beside her saying:

"Well, upon my word! What are you doing here?"

Margery started to her feet, amid a shower of bundles. "Why Mr. Keith! How you frightened me!"

"Did I? I 'm sorry. I thought I recognised your hat and I came over to see. I suppose you 've missed the train, too."

"Yes," murmured Margery. He was picking up her parcels as he spoke. She had one foot safely in its shoe and was desperately searching for the other.

"We have almost half an hour to wait.

Margery's Shoe

Won't you come and have some ice-cream, or something?"

"No, thank you," she stammered. "Very kind," she added, absently.

"Why not?"

"I—I can't. I've—" then, crimson with embarrassment, Margery whispered, "I've lost my shoe. It's back under the seat, I guess. I must have kicked it back—I was so tired," she concluded, irrelevantly.

Carter was already upon his knees. Presently he emerged from the stuffy darkness, triumphant. "Sit down and I'll put it on for you. It's such a bit of a shoe it's no wonder you lost it. Even Cinderella could n't have got it on—I'm sure of that. Now then, you're all right."

Margery's high colour receded gradually. "Thank you so much." Then she added, half shyly, "Did you miss the train?"

"I did," he responded, "by just half a minute." Judith would never have asked such a foolish question. Indeed, she seldom dealt with the obvious, and, more than once, he had told her that a man would need to be a mental kangaroo in order to keep up with her.

"I see you did n't have your parcels sent," he went on. He would not have said that to Judith, nor even asked her why she had not done so. If she had appeared at the station on a blistering July day with her arms full of

small packages, he would have known, without asking, that she had some very good reason.

"No," said Margery, with a smile. She had a dimple in her chin and another at the corner of her rosy mouth. Carter noted them approvingly, and thought it rather odd that he had never noticed them before. Judith had no dimples — she was n't the dimpled sort.

"Where did you get the dimples?" queried Carter, dreamily. "Do they sell them in the shops?"

She laughed outright, then. "No—of course not. How funny of you to ask!"

Carter laughed, too. He found the obvious mysteriously refreshing. His mind relaxed; he had a pleasant sense of being in command.

"What 's this?" he asked, indicating one of the small parcels.

"Tan ribbon for shoe-laces."

"Oh! And this?"

"A nail brush—a lovely white one."

"And this?"

Margery was doubtful for a moment, then peeped inside. "A pair of silk stockings—pale blue ones. A dollar and twenty-nine cents, marked down from a dollar and a half for to-day only."

"I see. And this?"

Margery's eyes sparkled. "A veil—an auto-

Automobile Veils

mobile one. White, shading into turquoise blue. Two yards and a half long. With fringe on it. Want to see it?"

"Not here—not now," he temporised. "I'll see it some day. You 'll wear it the next time you come out in the car with me, won't you—and Judith?"

"Yes. That 's why I got it. I 've had lots of veils but never an automobile one before. Father said automobiles were inventions of the devil and he would never go in one himself nor let me."

"You 're not afraid, though?"

"Oh, my goodness, no," she responded, with her blue eyes wide open. "How could I be, with you running it?"

This, again, was very different from Judith, who had stubbornly refused to go with him until he had learned to run the car.

"Here 's another one," Margery continued. "White, shading into pink and cerise. Fringe, too—cerise fringe. Want to see it?"

"Sometime, surely. But not now. Let 's go down to the train. The car will be open by this time and we 'll be sure of getting a good seat. Let me take your things—I can put most of them into my pockets."

"There 's lots of things you have n't asked about," said Margery as she went downstairs beside him, "but I have n't given you anything that will break. What do you suppose this

On the Subject of Hats

is?" She swung a large paper bag out in front of him.

"That 's easy."

"No, it is n't—I 'll give you three guesses."

"Hat," he answered.

"Oh," she said, openly disappointed. "You must have looked in, or felt of it."

"Some hats are felt, are n't they?"

Margery laughed gleefully—a joyous little ripple of mirth that seemed to bring the cool freshness of a mountain stream into the hot and dusty station. They had reached the train by this time.

"Go on back," he said, as they entered the last car. "We can open the windows and the back door and get whatever breeze there happens to be."

He turned a seat and sat down, facing Margery, who was still intent upon the subject of hats. "Look," she said, opening the bag. "Is n't it lovely?"

"Yes," he agreed, "it is. What do you call this?"

"It 's only tulle."

"I know what this is—velvet."

"You know a lot of things," she returned in affected wonder. "What colour is it?"

"Pink."

"No, it is n't; it 's cerise—a white tulle hat with a big bow of cerise velvet on it and a buckle of brilliants. Nothing could be more

An Automobile Hat

simple—or more expensive," she concluded, with a frown. "But is n't it beautiful?"

She took off the clover-trimmed hat as the train pulled out of the station, and poised the new one airily upon her yellow curls. The sun streamed through the open window and alighted upon the buckle, dazzling the eyes of the beholder.

"It is," he answered, and added, truthfully, "and so are you."

Margery blushed divinely. "Are I?—I mean, am I? I always used to say 'are I?' to Father. He liked it."

"So do I. Say it to me sometimes, won't you?"

"The veil is to go with it," she responded, irrelevantly.

"The blue one?"

"Gracious, no—the pink one, shading into cerise. The ends of it match the bow on the hat. It 's an automobile hat," she concluded.

"Will it look well with a red automobile?"

Margery's face fell. "No," she said, sadly, "it won't. I never thought of that."

"Never mind," he answered quickly, strangely moved by the spectacle of Beauty in Distress. "I can have the car painted any other colour you like."

"That is n't necessary." She was dignified, now, and a little cool.

"I know it. Nobody would ever think of looking at the car while you were in it."

This airy persiflage occupied the time so pleasantly that Carter was surprised when they reached their destination. A breath from the clover-fields welcomed them when the smoke of the departing engine finally cleared away.

"You can't walk home with all those parcels and those tired little feet," Carter was saying. "If you don't mind waiting here about twenty minutes, I 'll go and get the car and take you home, bag and baggage."

"That would be lovely. I *am* tired."

When he came back, she was wearing the new hat and had the pink veil tied over it. Carter mentally approved of it very much, but said nothing.

Margery sat beside him, silent and shy, as they went home. She answered him in monosyllables when he spoke.

Secretly, to her, he appeared as the incarnate hero of all the novels she had ever read. Judith, in her eyes, was veiled with wonder—being engaged to him.

"I 'm a thousand times obliged," she said as she stopped at the gate.

"You 're a thousand times welcome. Here—don't forget your parcels. Have you got everything?"

"Yes, I think so. Thank you again, and

Weary but happy

good-bye. Remember me to Judith, won't you?"

"Surely. Good-bye."

An empty envelope and a yellow sales-slip blew toward the cross-roads, but neither of them noticed it. The car purred away in a cloud of dust, and Margery, weary, heavy-laden, but very happy, went into the house, where the lonely man had been waiting for her ever since she went away.

IX

Blue Stockings

A find

"OF course they 're for me," Miss Cynthia was saying. "Don't they fit me perfectly?"

"Is everything yours that fits you?" queried Judith, mildly amused.

"It ought to be, if I want it. Whose are they, if they 're not mine?"

"I don't know. Anyhow, they 're damp and you 're to take them off this minute."

Going out upon the upper veranda, early in the morning, Miss Cynthia had found a pair of pale blue silk stockings, wet with the heavy dew of the preceding night. With childish delight, she sat down to put them on, and was even now contemplating with pleasure one small foot in a damp, but undeniably becoming, stocking.

"They say women can't reason," Miss Cynthia continued, as she meekly obeyed Judith, "but I was gifted at my birth with logic. Here are stockings, where stockings are not wont to be. The evidence of our senses does not permit us to deny the existence

Perplexed

of stockings. The question is, how did they come here? Not having wings, they were put here by some outward agency, natural or supernatural. We dismiss the latter at once. Nobody has been on this veranda since yesterday afternoon when there were no stockings, but you and I and Carter. You and I drop out by elimination. Consequently, Carter brought them, either for you or for me, and they 're not yours, because they 're too small. Q.E.D.," she concluded, with a laugh.

"But," Judith objected, "why should Carter bring you stockings?"

"Why should Carter not?" challenged Miss Cynthia. "Is it not perfectly proper? Is not Carter a perfectly proper young man? If it had not been proper, would not Carter have at once made it so by doing it?"

"I did n't mean that. Why should he bring you stockings and forget to give them to you? If he 'd done it, he 'd have had them wrapped in tissue paper. Besides, he never forgets things."

Judith was somewhat perplexed, for, though Miss Cynthia's explanation seemed to be the only one possible, nothing could have been more unlike Carter than to buy stockings for anybody. And as for leaving them unwrapped upon the veranda—she shook her head.

"It was either Carter or fairies," Miss Cynthia went on, hanging the stockings upon

How Shall We Bear It?

the railing of the balcony to dry in the morning sun. "It's a matter of extremes, for Carter is n't what you might call fairy-like. Shall we have breakfast outdoors?"

"If you like," Judith answered, as the maid appeared with the tray.

"To-night," Miss Cynthia said, while she was pouring the coffee, "I shall thank him for them in my prettiest manner."

"You can't to-night, for he is n't coming. Don't you remember? He told us last night that he had to go out of town this morning and would n't be back until to-morrow, or at the best, the last train to-night. We sha' n't see him again until Friday night."

"How terrible," Miss Cynthia murmured. "I wonder how we shall bear it!" She smiled mockingly at Judith, and was rewarded by a bit of scarlet that signalled from either cheek.

"Don't tease," Judith pleaded. "Have a muffin?"

"Two muffins, but consecutively, rather than simultaneously. Are n't you sleepy, after having been up last night until almost one o'clock?"

"It was n't one—it was only half-past twelve. You mistook the striking of the clock."

"It struck one just before you began on the last instalment of farewells. Then it struck one about a moment after you stepped on the

Chaperons

squeaky board in front of your door. And, before your light was out, it had struck one again, so don't blame the clock.

"I 'm not sure," the old lady continued, "that an unmarried woman of any age is a proper chaperone. On the face of it, it 's ridiculous, but most of the conventionalities are based upon the sheerest nonsense. If your little friend Miss Margery were married, she could chaperone both of us when Carter called. And we 're both older, and even you know more than she 'll have packed away inside her pretty head thirty years from now. Modesty forbids my making any comparisons with myself."

"Aunt Cynthia," said Judith, suddenly, "why did you never marry?"

The mocking light died out of the old lady's eyes and her face paled, though almost imperceptibly. A pathetic droop came upon her shoulders that, but a moment before, had been bravely straight. The morning sun brought into cruel relief grim, unsuspected lines about her mouth. In an instant she had crossed an intangible line of division. She was old and broken now—she who had always been young.

With downcast eyes she stirred her coffee furiously, then cleared her throat. "Everybody marries," she said, in a tone new to Judith, "when the right person comes along,

Two Sides to the Truth

unless there is some barrier which makes it impossible."

"And you—" murmured Judith, with dreamy eyes far out upon the garden. "Did the right one come?"

"Yes," returned Miss Cynthia, in a whisper.

"Then there was a barrier between you?"

"No."

Judith turned astonished eyes to Miss Cynthia. "Then—why?"

"My dear," the old lady answered, irrelevantly, "a fool can ask more questions in a minute than a wise man can answer in a week. Why does old cheese lie still in Winter and promenade all around the kitchen in Summer? Why does the kind grocer always put the large fruit on the top of the basket instead of leaving it at the bottom to surprise the happy purchaser? Why does the young moon rise in one place and the old moon in another? And why, when relatives are perfectly sincere and friends more or less deceitful, do most of us prefer friends?"

"Because none of us likes to be told the truth. Is that the answer?"

"There are two sides to the truth," Miss Cynthia said, quite herself again, "just as there is to everything else. When there is n't a back and front, there 's an inside and an outside. You may say that a woman is cross, disorderly, idle, and given to unkind gossip;

Miss Cynthia's Message

also that she is unselfish, and would do anything in the world for those she loves. Both statements may be absolutely true. A relative would naturally choose one to talk about and a friend the other. Are you going to take a nap this afternoon?"

"No—it 's Thursday. I go to Mr. Chandler's, you know. What shall I tell him for you? Do you want to send him anything?"

"I don't know that it 's proper for an unmarried woman to be sending things to an unmarried man whom she 's never met. I hope it is n't, for I have so little opportunity to yield to the allurements of sin. You may take him a pot of that preserved ginger."

"And a note?"

Miss Cynthia shook her head decidedly. "No—no note. Ask him why cheese walks in the Summer and if it is immoral to cheat at solitaire."

When Judith delivered her message that afternoon, Chandler laughed heartily and even Margery dimpled into a smile. Miss Cynthia never forgot. When Judith came she always had some sort of message, though it might be only a joke clipped from a stray newspaper.

"I 'm a thousand times obliged for the ginger," he said, "and cheese walks in Summer because the heat develops the activity of its hibernating population, and it is not

immoral to cheat at solitaire. How is the dear lady?"

"She 's well, thank you. We were much exercised this morning over stockings that came from nowhere. Apparently, they dropped out of the heavens in the night to our veranda. They 're just the colour of the sky to-day—a lovely pale blue—silk, and very small."

"Why," said Margery, doubtfully. "They must be mine—the ones I lost yesterday. I 've hunted for them high and low—all through the house and down the road and everywhere. I never thought of asking him."

"Him?" repeated Judith, turning to Margery in astonishment.

"Why, yes—Mr. Keith, you know. We came out together yesterday. I met him at the station and then when we got here, he went and got the car to bring me home in it, because I was tired and had so many things to carry. He said he 'd remember me to you—did n't he?"

"Of course," lied Judith. "I 'd forgotten."

Margery's childlike eyes perceived no change in that beautiful, serene face. Chandler, happening to observe her more closely, saw the merest suggestion of perplexity or annoyance—nothing more. It was like the momentary reflection in a brook of the cloud that passes far above it, scurrying upon some

Joy and Pain

celestial errand at the bidding of the four winds.

"And the stockings?" Judith was saying in her cool, deep voice. "Did he forget to give them to you?"

"He must have. He had all my little parcels in his pockets and I did n't miss it at first,—I had so many—the nail brush and the tan ribbon, and the two veils and my hat, and——"

"I 'm sorry," Judith said, kindly, interrupting the recapitulation. "I 'll see that you get them."

"It is nothing," Judith was saying to herself, sternly, "absolutely nothing. He forgot to speak of it—that 's all." Then her reason added, in gallant defence of him: "Why should he speak of it? Am I a child or a fool that I must be told everything? Need he account to me for every minute we 're not together?"

The memory of last night's last hour stirred in her heart, like a living thing. All the tenderness, the dear foolishness, the strong clasp of his arms around her, the touch of his lips upon her hair, the music of his deep voice, saying over and over again, "I love you—I love you—I love you"—she answered to it as though it were now, instead of yesterday. And still, into her joy had come the element of pain that forever is inextricably mingled with woman's love. Primitive Woman, part

Out of Tune

and parcel of Judith's being, yet, until now, asleep, moved uneasily, then awoke with a start, and rubbed her eyes—vengefully on guard to watch over her own.

"Are you rested?" Chandler asked. "Shall we play now?"

"Surely." With an effort Judith separated herself from her secret confusion. All this could be put aside and shut away to be considered later. Chandler's man wheeled his chair into the corner by the piano where he usually sat, with the sunlight on his music-rack but out of his eyes. Judith, rather pale but outwardly self-possessed, struck a few preliminary chords.

"The piano needs tuning," she said.

"I know it. I 've been meaning to have it done."

"I think we need tuning ourselves, sometimes," Judith went on, "but there 's never anybody to do it."

"Except ourselves."

Judith turned to look at him. "Can we always do it?"

"Why not?"

"You 're so like Aunt Cynthia," she murmured. "She always answers questions with other questions—unless she deals in epigrams, which are infinitely worse. Sometimes it seems as if she must sit up half the night, absorbing the output from an epigram factory."

A Broken Chord

"I wish I knew her," Chandler said, tuning his violin.

"I wish you did. Do you want to try this?"

"Yes."

They played a gay little dance, but beneath it, in Judith's thought, a single phrase suited itself to the rhythm. "He did n't tell me—he did n't tell me—he did n't tell me—he did n't tell me." It seemed as though the words sang themselves loudly enough for all the world to hear. Long before they reached the end, it had become unbearable and Judith stopped, with a broken chord.

"I 'm not in the mood for this to-day. Let 's try something else."

"Very well."

She sorted over their music, her hands trembling a little, then she chanced upon a book containing parts of *Lohengrin*, arranged for violin and piano. They began with the Wedding March, then played other selections less familiar.

"Let 's try this," Judith suggested. "It 's lovely—it 's the part where she asks him his name."

Chandler's violin crashed to the floor. "No," he cried—"not that!"

She turned in amazement, stooping mechanically to pick up the violin. Margery, humming to herself, idly passed the window, pausing at

Ghosts

the apple tree to pick up a fallen twig and toss it to the puppy, gambolling at her heels.

"What is it?" asked Judith softly.

"Nothing," sighed Chandler, taking the violin, which, fortunately, was not broken. "It was only a ghost—that 's all."

"Ghosts seem to be haunting us both this afternoon. I 'm in a wretched mood."

"So am I," he answered, putting his violin back into its case. "Let 's not play any more to-day."

Judith went home an hour earlier than usual. Miss Cynthia was on the upper balcony, amusing herself with a pack of cards. "Is it immoral to cheat at solitaire?" she asked, looking up when Judith spoke to her.

"No—he says not."

"I 'm so sorry," sighed Miss Cynthia. "I hoped it was and I just did it."

"I found out about the stockings," Judith said, keeping her voice even with an effort. "They 're Margery's."

"How did Margery's stockings come on my porch?" the old lady queried, putting away the cards.

"Carter met her at the station, yesterday, accidentally, and put her small parcels into his pockets. She was so tired, from a day's shopping, that he went after his car and took her home. This happened to be left in his pocket, and, not knowing it, he can't have missed it.

The Primitive Woman Within

When he took off his coat and laid it on the arm of that big chair, they must have slipped out."

"I see. I told you it was Carter."

"Was n't it nice of him?" demanded Judith.

"What—to leave her stockings on my porch? I should say not. He disappointed both of us."

"I did n't mean that. Was n't it nice of him to go and get his car when she was so tired and take her home?"

Miss Cynthia observed Judith narrowly before she spoke. "Very nice. But then, Carter is always doing nice things."

"Yes," Judith echoed, loyally: "Carter is always doing nice things."

Pleading weariness, Judith went to bed very early but she could not sleep. In vain did she reason with the Primitive Woman within her; scornfully did she accuse herself of disloyalty. Womanlike, at the first, she had prayed that her love of him might be tested. Womanlike, now, she shrank from even the thought of a test.

Toward dawn, she went into Miss Cynthia's room. "What is it?" murmured the old lady, drowsily. "Is anybody ill?"

"No. I just want to talk."

"Talk, then. I won't hinder you."

"Aunt Cynthia," cried Judith, in a rush of doubt and pain, "he did n't tell me!"

"Who did n't tell you what?"

Why?

"Carter. He did n't tell me that he met Margery in town and took her home in his car."

Miss Cynthia sat up in bed, rubbed her eyes, then lighted the candle on the little table at her bedside. Judith's scarlet kimono only emphasised the whiteness of her face, veiled in the night of her hair, and the pitiful questioning in her eyes.

"Is it a crime?" asked the old lady. "Is he in danger of being hung for it?"

Judith laughed hysterically. "No, but why did n't he tell me?"

"Once," said Miss Cynthia, dreamily, "there was a man who was capable of lifelong devotion to one woman, but he died before he was out of knickerbockers."

"Aunt Cynthia! You shan't accuse him of—of——"

"Of what?"

"Of anything!"

The old lady leaned back among her pillows. Gracefully, with a small, ringless hand, she concealed a yawn. The whiteness of her gown made her face slightly pink by contrast, but the mass of hair that was spread out upon her pillow was as white as the pillow itself. The candlelight lay lovingly upon her hair, bringing forth fitful gleams of silver.

"All right," said Miss Cynthia, politely. "I

Asking a Man Questions

won't accuse him of anything. Sometimes I forget, however, that the king can do no wrong."

"He probably forgot to speak of it," remarked Judith, half to herself. "It was such a little, little thing!"

"Probably," assented Miss Cynthia, with the merest suggestion of sarcasm.

"If he doesn't, would you ask?"

"If he doesn't what?"

"If he doesn't speak of it, would you ask him about it?"

"Judith, dear! Twenty-six, and seriously considering asking a man questions?"

"Why not?" she demanded.

Miss Cynthia fixed her wonderful eyes upon the unhappy figure in scarlet, sitting upon the foot of her bed, but only for an instant. Leaning over, she blew out the light.

"Some women," she observed, "want to ask a man questions. Others prefer not to be lied to."

There was an interval of silence. "Good-night," said Judith.

"Good-night," returned Miss Cynthia, and added softly: "dear."

Musing upon the mysterious way of a man with a woman, Miss Cynthia fell asleep again almost immediately. The younger woman, more unhappy than before, deeply regretted the attempt to take Miss Cynthia into her confidence.

Three Magic Words

At sunrise, there was a rush of wings past her window, then a coo and a flutter as the messenger alighted upon the sill.

"Oh," breathed Judith, with her troubled heart mercifully eased.

She took the note out of the aluminum case. It was only three words: "I love you," signed with a star for a kiss. She sprinkled a few grains of corn upon the window sill for the pigeon, and while he pecked at it, wrote her answer: "And I love you."

She was radiant, as from some inner light, when she closed the screen and set the pigeon free. The phantoms of the night and of the day before were swept away by an overwhelming surge of loyalty and love. What more could there ever be to say? What more could there ever be to know, aside from those three words?

Primitive Woman, with a deep sigh, settled herself to sleep once more until she should be called, and, presently, Judith slept also.

X

A Woman's Hair

A Bad Night

IT was past noon when Judith came down, rather dreading the awkward moment of meeting. By day we may deal with the airy superstructure of our emotions, but, at three in the morning, we get down to the foundation. At night the soul claims the right to stand face to face with itself, as before some mirror placed in a pitiless light and, with unsparing eyes, seek the truth.

Miss Cynthia, with crutch and cane, had just returned from a tour of the garden. "Did you have a bad night?" she queried, lightly, "or were you merely making up lost sleep?"

"I had rather a bad night," Judith returned truthfully. "I 'm very sorry I woke you."

"Woke me!" repeated Miss Cynthia. "Why, my dear—you did n't wake me!"

"Yes I did—don't you remember? When I came into your room to talk?"

"You were n't in my room, Judith—it was only a dream."

"Perhaps," the young woman returned,

White Linen

gratefully. "Sometimes we sleep more than we think we do."

"Nearly always, I imagine. You must be hungry. Will you have breakfast, or luncheon?"

"Breakfast, please—but I 'm ashamed to ask for it at this hour."

"You need n't be. Home is a place where we all do as we please—usually regardless of the others."

Completely deceived by Miss Cynthia's ready tact, Judith was at ease again. During the afternoon, while the old lady read aloud in her high, sweet voice, Judith put the last stitches into the embroidered panel that was to be the front of her wedding gown.

"It 's lovely," said Miss Cynthia, leaning forward to examine it. "I 've often wondered, though, why you chose linen to be married in."

"Because," the young woman returned, with a scarlet signal upon either cheek, "I was wearing a white linen gown the day he—the day Carter—" She paused, in lovely confusion.

"Don't go on," teased Miss Cynthia, with a wicked flash in her eyes. "All proposals are alike."

"Someone once said," Judith continued, hastily, "that men were different but husbands were all alike."

A Man's Proposal

"'T is n't so, dearest. If it were, no woman would marry twice."

"Aunt Cynthia!"

"Yes, dear—I 'm listening."

"Don't be so cynical."

"I 'm not. Never having had a husband, may I not observe the creature from a respectful distance? A man says: 'I love you—will you marry me?' What he really means is: 'Will you come to look after my house, do my mending, bear my children, bring them up, cook for me when necessary, and see that the plumbing is in perfect order? I shall give you board and clothes, though you may have to speak several times about the clothes, and an occasional pat on the cheek.'"

"Love is service," murmured Judith. "It 's giving, not receiving."

"Woman's love is, yes. Man's love is—well, something entirely different. Carter may be running around backwards on your account now, but after you 're married, he 'll have forgotten all the fancy steps in a very short time. He 'll go straight ahead, and may not even look behind to see whether you 're coming or not. The whole business reminds me of the old farmer who started in to see all the side-shows at the Exposition. He said he went into 'Exit' first and it was such a miserable fake that he did n't care to go any farther."

Judith sighed and turned her face away.

Calling Up Carter

The clear olive skin was pale now and the scarlet mouth had settled into lines of unwonted sadness. Repentantly, Miss Cynthia leaned forward to pat Judith's hand and pick up the embroidery that had slipped to the floor unheeded.

"Don't mind me, dear," she said, humbly. "Naturally I disdain the side-shows. I got into 'Exit,' too."

Judith answered with a kiss. "I was n't 'minding'—I was just thinking."

"Thinking is unprofitable—I never do it personally. Go and call up Carter and ask him to come here to dinner. I 'd like to see the boy myself. If you think it 's unmaidenly to tell him you 're lonely without him, you may say that I am literally suffering for even a glimpse of him; that my world is as night without the sun."

Judith came back from the telephone, laughing. "I infer he 's coming?" asked Miss Cynthia, with a slight elevation of her eyebrows.

"Yes. He asked me to tell you that while he would love to be your son, he can only be your nephew-in-law."

"Clever child, Carter. What shall we give him for dinner?"

"I 'll leave that to you."

So the old lady planned the indigestible feast which she knew would please her guest.

The Heart of a Woman

Carter came at six, with white roses for Judith and pink ones for Miss Cynthia, who had chosen to linger upon the upper balcony until the rapturous moments of meeting had subsided. At times, when the lovers sat together in the twilight, happily oblivious of her, a long-closed door in Miss Cynthia's heart swung open upon its rusty hinges, and a troop of ghosts came forth, to trouble and to beckon. She, too, had known her perfect hour.

Who shall write of the heart of a woman—the long winding passages, thick with swaying cobwebs, the cold hearths deep with dust? Who shall tell of its desolate altars, deserted by him for whom the candles were lighted, while shadows creep steadily toward the flickering lights and the fragrance of the incense dies away in the dark? Hidden in many a secret chamber, behind doors that are closed and barred, the lost faiths mourn, the broken illusions lie helpless, and the dead dreams wait for resurrection.

Ready to trust, eager to believe, and desperately hungry for love, the woman waits for ever behind her closed door. She dare not open it and beckon, lest Love pass on unheeding; she must wait until his voice sounds outside, pleading for entrance, and even then, she fears to answer his first summons.

Tortured by woman's burning need to give, she must yet withhold—if she would have

Love stay. After long waiting, she must affect to be taken by surprise. She must wake long-slumbering echoes with light laughter, reaching even to the mournful solitude where the dead dreams lie. And if, eagerly searching his eyes, she reads therein even a word of the message her soul craves, she will beckon him mysteriously into the inmost recesses of her heart.

When he hesitates before a closed door, she will say, with a smile: "Nay—not there." When he pauses at a desolated altar, enshrouded in a wonderful silken fabric that has lain long among roses, she will lead him away swiftly, lest he guess what lies hidden beneath. If he turns at the sound of a ghostly footfall in the corridor behind him she will answer his thought, saying: "'T is merely the sound of thine own steps. Come."

By devious paths she brings him at last to her holy of holies, pausing for an instant to question him with her eyes before she opens wide the door. Having brought him face to face with her love of her own whiteness, she shrinks back into the shadow, praying that he may understand.

But too often the man's eyes, fogged by the mists of passion, turn, burning, to her as if to say: "What is this to which you have brought me? I want you!"

Then, if she has the strength and the courage

The Barriers Crumble

she will close the door quickly, murmuring, "Nay—nay, it is nothing. Come—we will hasten back." Thus she leads him to the entrance again, and graciously bids him farewell.

Once in a lifetime, perhaps,—seldom more,—the man's eyes see clearly into the sanctuary, and the woman starts toward him out of the shadow with a cry of gladness that rings through the desolation like the peal of a silver trumpet. There is nothing there but whiteness, bareness, yet, to him who understands, the place is holy.

He has only to reach out his hand to the woman, and say, "Come—let us kneel and worship together." Then, as by magic, all the barriers crumble into dust, the cobwebs vanish, and the dead dreams rise again, radiant, having put on the garments of immortality.

Night after night, when the tasks of the day are done, the woman will lead him to her heart and show him all. With her, he will restore the broken illusions and comfort the lost faiths until they cease to mourn. The desolated altars will be made fair again, and the enshrouding tapestries folded and put away. At the last, with laughter which has in it no hint of sadness, she will show him the room in which she has endeavoured to reshape her ideals in accordance with her realities—and has failed.

He, too, may laugh, though his eyes soften with pity. Swiftly she will understand that hereafter in that same room, they are to labour together, shaping, moulding, and lifting their realities to the ideal, but they will not speak of this—because Love has no need of words.

When Miss Cynthia went down, Judith and Carter were sitting decorously opposite each other on the lower veranda. Only the light in the young man's eyes and Judith's loosened hair betrayed them.

"I 've missed you," said Miss Cynthia.

"And I you. I was very lonely last evening with no one to abuse me and tell me of my faults."

"Who should tell you of your faults, if not I? Am I not soon to be a relative?"

"What do you call soon?" parried Carter.

"It 's a relative term, merely. Can your legal mind grasp the subtlety of that?"

"With an effort, yes." Then, with a quick change of tone, he went on: "Can you be serious for a few minutes?"

"If it 's absolutely necessary."

"Well, what are you going to do when Judith and I are married?"

"Give you a present, of course. You expect it, don't you? Have you decided upon what you want?"

"You promised to be serious," Carter said,

A Small Parcel

reproachfully. "Will you come to live with us? We both want you—really." Miss Cynthia wiped away a hasty tear.

"We do," said Judith. "Oh, dear Aunt Cynthia, won't you come?"

The old lady was deeply touched, yet she hid it with a smile. "You may think you want me," she murmured, "but you don't. Besides, you annoy me terribly with your love-making."

"We won't take no for an answer," Carter said, firmly. "If you won't come of your own accord, we 'll kidnap you in the most modern fashion, by automobile."

"Perhaps," said Miss Cynthia.

"Is that a promise?"

"No. I won't promise, but I 'll think about it. Come in to dinner."

That evening, while Miss Cynthia sat a little apart from them, they talked House. In their thoughts, the word always began with a capital. When she slipped away to bed, she was unobserved. Some little time afterward, when they noted her absence, they left the subject of House and took up Personalities.

It was later than usual when Carter began to go home. "Wait a minute," said Judith. "I forgot something."

She came back, presently, with a small parcel wrapped in tissue paper. "It 's Margery Gordon's stockings," she said. "You forgot to give them to her."

Put in the Wrong

"Oh," said Carter, awkwardly. "Did I?" He took the parcel, put it into his pocket, then there was silence, but not of the intimate sort which does not require speech. Carter stood first upon one foot, then upon the other, trying desperately to think of something to say.

Then Judith lifted her face to his. "Good-night, dear. It 's very late."

"Good-night, darling."

Conflicting emotions swayed him as he went down the road. Surely there is nothing more exasperating to a man than to feel himself under the necessity of making an explanation to a woman who has not asked for it. By some subtle feminine method, he had been put in the wrong, and he squirmed under the awkwardness of it.

Then, by an heroic effort, he dismissed it as a thing of no moment. Almost immediately it was back, confronting him from new angles and offering unsuspected points of view. Resentment against Judith smouldered, then burst into flame. Yet, after all, what had she done? What else could she have done?

Of course he had dropped the stockings, but how had she known to whom they belonged? Had Margery told her, or by the uncanny cleverness which is the birthright of every woman, had she divined it? "I should have spoken of it," he muttered. "I forgot—that 's all."

Much Annoyed

But, as the night waned, Carter's conscience actively reminded him that he had n't forgotten it—indeed that he had purposely avoided all the easy conversational paths that might have led to Margery and the car. He was conscious of the parcel upon his dresser; it seemed that the stockings might speak to him, if they wanted to. Miserably he hoped that they would n't, then laughed a little, at his own disordered fancy.

Why in thunder could n't Judith take them back herself? Or send them back? Or mail them? Or write a note to Margery and ask her to come and get her infernal parcel? Why should a young and promising lawyer be kept awake by a pair of blue silk stockings?

Hitherto, he had never known Judith to fail in tact. Why did she speak of it when she knew how the stockings had happened to be there, and to whom they belonged? A more gracious, kindly woman would not have brought the matter to his notice. Judith must have known that it would annoy him.

Perhaps—the thought made Carter sit up in bed, wide awake—perhaps that was why she had done it! He knew that Judith went to Chandler's on Monday and Thursday afternoons. What would have been easier than for her to put the things in her pocket—if she had one—next Monday, and give them to the owner with some graceful and appropriate

remark, such as—well, such as: "Here, Margery—here 's your socks!"

"She could say it just as well as not," he thought, wretchedly, "but she expects me to."

He was aroused from uneasy slumber by the carrier pigeon cooing at his window. "Go away," murmured Carter, turning his back to the window, but the persistent bird lingered, even after he had received his morning ration of corn. It occurred to him that he might send the stockings back to Judith by the pigeon, but—no, that would n't do. Even if he fastened one firmly to each leg, the bird would never get there with them. And how the whole village would gape at the apparition in the skies—a pigeon with a pair of long silk stockings dangling from his hampered body!

As the messenger was still waiting, Carter wrote a note. It was brief, but to the point, being, merely: "I 'm sorry I did n't tell you.—CARTER."

He was asleep when the answer came, but went eagerly to the window to get it. That, too, was brief: "It does n't matter.—JUDITH." By all the dictates of reason, he should have felt better, but he did n't.

That day he chanced to see, in a jeweller's window, a silver chain from which hung a single abalone pearl, set in dull silver. He took it to Judith that night and presented it to her, with careless grace. She was de-

Under an Apple Tree

lighted, and even Miss Cynthia thought it was lovely.

Nothing was said of the stockings, nor did Judith seem to avoid the topic. She made no allusion to the message the pigeon had brought, knowing, doubtless, that for a man to say he is sorry, or to stammer out the words, "forgive me," indicates unsounded depths of abasement and devotion.

Sunday morning, the stockings still confronted him from his chiffonier. Desiring to get the thing over with as soon as possible, he determined to go to Chandler's that afternoon for perhaps fifteen minutes, take him a book or a magazine, and when he was leaving, apparently as a careless afterthought, give Margery her troublesome personal property.

When he stopped the car at the gate, the place seemed deserted. Inside, having passed a wakeful night, Chandler slept soundly in his chair. Carter went around to the back door, in search of a servant, and at the apple-tree came upon Margery, who did not see him at first.

She sat upon a low stool, with her white skirts heaped around her—a mass of lace and frills. Around her, gleaming in the sun, fell a mass of golden hair, rippling to the ground and veiling her face.

Carter caught his breath. Copper and burnished gold, yet having the texture of silk;

Carter Returns the Parcel

sinuous, alive, wonderful! The colour of a sunset gleaming upon polished brass, faint hints of iridescence here and there—hair to blind men's eyes and weave itself into a sorcery from whence there was no escape!

Margery stood up, her back toward him, humming the merest fragment of a song. It bore no relation whatever to any tune he had ever heard. She put her hands up to the back of her neck, divided her hair, spread it out to arm's length, then let it fall, slowly—a cloud of golden mist.

"Margery!" the man breathed, huskily.

She turned, quickly, with a rush of colour staining her face. "Oh-h!" she gasped. "How you frightened me!"

"Did I? I 'm sorry. I just came to bring these back." He offered her the parcel.

"Thank you. It 's more than kind of you. I was very stupid to forget."

"Not at all."

They stood looking at each other for an awkward moment, then Margery turned toward the house, murmuring the timeworn phrase which the girl-child probably learns just after she has been taught to say "mamma and papa."

"I 've just washed my hair and I can't do a thing with it!"

"It 's beautiful," Carter said, in all sincerity.

"Are it?" queried Margery, with a side-

At Peace with Himself

long glance that set his heart to thumping wildly.

"It are," he rejoined, soemnly. Subconsciously he reflected that no man could say "it are" to Judith.

They had reached the veranda now. "Will you come in?" Margery asked, politely. "I 'll wake Mr. Chandler and go up to put myself in order."

"Thank you, no. Just give him this little book and say that I called. I have an engagement and I 'm late now."

"Then good-bye, and thank you."

"You 're welcome. Good-bye."

The blood beat hard in his pulses as he climbed into the car. As he had said, he had an engagement and was late, but he drove the car at top speed through the dust for nearly two hours before he stopped at Miss Cynthia's gate, weary and travel-stained, but at peace with himself.

XI

"Parliamentary Law"

Waiting

THE sorrel mare brushed away the flies vigorously. For more than half an hour she had stood in front of a yellow house with green blinds, pleasantly set in the midst of a garden, "somewhat back from the village street."

The garden seemed to be cool, but the road was very hot and dusty. Everything was quiet but the flies. Even the old man who sat in the buggy, loosely holding the reins, was apparently asleep. From the house issued a low, murmurous sound to be compared only to that made by a hive of bees. Now and then, a sharp penetrating voice, a little higher in pitch than the rest, rose above the clamour for an instant, then died away.

The bent old figure in the buggy nodded and the reins slipped from his hand. The mare brushed away more flies, snorted, and took a few steps forward.

"Whoa, Molly! Stand still, that 's a good girl. I reckon she 'll be comin' by-and-bye."

To guard against further mishap, Uncle

The Group at the Gate

Henry tied the reins to the dashboard, made himself a little more comfortable on the wide, low seat, and settled back into the shade.

One by one, three women came from the house, then a group of four or five. Then, after a brief interval, two more appeared and joined the larger group at the gate. Nobody spoke to Uncle Henry, but they sotened their voices instinctively as they approached him.

Another woman, with her hat somewhat askew and her face flushed, came quickly down the walk, looking neither to the right nor to the left. She passed the group at the gate without speaking. They watched her, open-mouthed, until she had disappeared in a cloud of dust, then two turned and followed at a respectful distance, and the others went around to the back of the house.

Molly looked anxiously toward the house and switched valiantly at the tormenting flies. She longed for the shade of the barnyard, the trough of cool water, and the impertinent collie that sometimes snapped at her heels, but only for fun. She pawed the earth nervously, then sent forth a long whinny that woke Uncle Henry and speedily brought Aunt Belinda to the gate.

"I did n't know you was here, Henry," the old lady said, as she climbed in. "Have you been waitin' long?"

"Better part of an hour, I reckon. You

told me to be here at five o'clock and I was." He consulted his worn silver watch. "It 's nigh on to six now."

Aunt Belinda's Excuses

"My sakes alive!" cried Aunt Belinda. "It 's a lucky thing there ain't much to do to supper aside from warmin' it up. He 's not comin' home till late. She 's gone to town and they 're goin' to have supper together some place and go to the the-ay-ter afterward." As "he" meant Carter, "she" was always Judith. "I 'd have come sooner if I 'd knowed you was waitin'."

"You could have looked," he suggested. He had passed the time very pleasantly, dozing, but his masculine nature instinctively took the opportunity to show how gracefully a superior being could endure annoyance.

"I did n't know they was goin' to be so late," Aunt Belinda went on, "or I 'd have told you different. I ain't never liked to be the first one to leave the Sewin' Circle. If there 's talkin' to be done, I 'd rather not be the one it 's about, and by stayin' till all the others have gone, there ain't likely to be anythin' said about me. I reckon they won't talk about me to-day, though."

Uncle Henry grunted an unintelligible assent. "Get up, Molly!" He was hungry, and from preparations he had come upon in the pantry just before he left home, surmised that there would be hot biscuit for supper.

Mis' Stebbins

"On account of its bein' the last meetin', there was considerable business to be took up anyway, and Mis' Jed Stebbins was there from over to the Ridge. She come with her sister-in-law. She's visitin' her. Just got here yesterday and there was n't a one of us had heard of her comin' till she walked in."

There was a brief silence, which was meant to be tantalising, but was not. Uncle Henry was considering whether or not there might be honey with the biscuits. "Well?" he said, at length, in the tone of polite inquiry a husband uses when he means "what of it?"

"Well, as I was sayin'," resumed Aunt Belinda, clearing her throat, "none of us knew she was here till she come in. There was plenty of business before the meetin' as it was. We 'd met to decide what to do with all the money there was in the treasury."

"Well," said Uncle Henry again, "what did you do with it?"

"Nothin'. We ain't done nothin' with it and ain't like to, unless we meet again after Mis' Jed Stebbins has gone back where she belongs, and I understand she's like to stay until after the cannin' and preservin' season is over. She was tellin' us about her cousin's wife's mother's raspberry jam. She puts almonds in it—blanched almonds. Did you ever hear the like of that?"

"It sounds good," commented Uncle Henry

with an accession of interest. "Was you layin' out to have honey to-night with them biscuits?"

A Woman's Club

"Mis' Dunlap had to go home to see to her supper," Aunt Belinda went on, heedless of the intrusion of an alien topic into the conversation. "She told Mis' Stebbins that she need n't hurry—that she could come whenever she liked—and so she stayed, and the rest of us did n't have no chance."

"What about the money in the treasury?"

"I 'm comin' to that as fast as I can. Mis' Stebbins was in the city all last Winter with some relatives of her husband's while he was in the hospital havin' his insides took out and put in different, and her cousin's wife's mother took her to what in the city they call a Woman's Club."

"What 's that?" demanded Uncle Henry, with a suggestion of resentment. The phrase was not reassuring.

"Just the same as a Sewin' Circle as far as I see, only it 's a different name. They don't sew none."

"Who do they club?"

"Each other, I reckon. Mis' Stebbins was sayin' that they marked historic spots where battles was fought with brass tablets and she said her cousin's wife's mother said one day right out in meetin' that charity began at home and she thought they ought to put a

Mis' Stebbins Speaks Out

brass tablet by their own front door. Mis' Stebbins was laughin' about it but nobody else did. 'Tain't good manners to have jokes all to yourself. That 's what it says in my magazine, anyway."

"Go on," said Uncle Henry, submissively. Evidently there was a certain amount of conversation to be unloaded from Aunt Belinda's mind before she could be induced to consider the more inspiring subject of biscuits.

"As I was sayin' when you interrupted me, as soon as we was all there, Mis' Christy bein' late on account of her youngest boy havin' fell into the cistern, Mis' Marshall says: 'Well, ladies, what are we goin' to do with the money we have in the treasury?'

"Before any of us could say a word, Mis' Jed Stebbins says, like she was terrible astonished: 'Why, ladies! Don't you conduct your meetin's accordin' to parlimenty law?'"

"Par-li-a-mentary," Uncle Henry corrected. "It means the laws made by Parliament, over in England."

"What 's that got to do with the Edgerton Ladies Baptist Sewin' Circle and Missionary Society?" demanded Aunt Belinda.

"I dunno," Uncle Henry murmured, pacifically.

"No more do I. But Mis' Stebbins was settin' there like she was a teacher and we was her class. And Mis' Marshall says to her,

Constitution and By-Laws

very polite: 'How is that?' And Mis' Stebbins says: 'La sakes! Ain't you got no constitution and by-laws?'

"I spoke up then and I says my constitution is fair to middlin', in spite of havin' come from a family what died young, but I had n't any by-laws now that my husband's immediate family was all dead. And Mis' Dunlap snickered and said: 'Blessed are them as has no by-laws.' I reckon she 's had her own troubles with Mis' Stebbins.

"Mis' Stebbins says then that the constitution and by-laws ain't got nothin' to do with our systems and our relations. She says it 's the rules the society goes by. Mis' Marshall says we ain't never had no rules to go by. We just talked things over and what the most of us approved was done, sometimes peaceful and sometimes not, but it did n't matter as long as it was did. And then she smiled at Mis' Stebbins, but us what knew her could see she was gettin' mad, and she says: 'Could your city Woman's Club that you 're speakin' of do any different than that?'

"'Oh, my, yes,' says Mis' Stebbins. 'If you like, I 'll conduct this meetin' accordin' to parlimenty law,' and everybody but Mis' Marshall says 'Yes—do!'

"Mis' Stebbins bows and smiles and says: 'I bow to the wishes of the majority, though I 'd sooner it would be unaminous'—this last

The Hammer

evidently bein' meant for Mis' Marshall, who was gettin' more mad every minute. Then Mis' Stebbins says: 'If you please, I will take the chair,' and she makes Mis' Marshall move over on the sofy beside old Mis' Harper, though nobody wanted to set by her on account of bein' expected to yell into her ear-trumpet everythin' that was said, and on account of her havin' had fleas very recent and smellin' terrible strong of pennyroyal.

"Mis' Marshall set where she was told, but all the time her mad was risin',—you could see that. Everybody but Mis' Stebbins. She was settin' there in Mis' Marshall's chair as peaceful and quiet as could be, and she says: 'For the present, we will assume that I am the President of the Edgerton Ladies Baptist Sewin' Circle and Missionary Society. Mis' Blake, would you mind gettin' me the hammer?'

"Mis' Blake went out and come in with the hatchet and the tack-hammer. 'Which 'll you have?' says she, and Mis' Stebbins took the tack hammer, which relieved the minds of us all some, and then she pounded three or four times on Mis' Blake's best walnut table, leavin' marks that 'll have to be took out by a hot iron, and says in a loud voice: 'The meetin' will please come to order.' Yes, Henry, just like that. Them 's her very words.

"You c'd have heard a pin drop, and then Mis' Harper pushes the end of her ear-trumpet

A Secretary

over to Mis' Marshall, and says: 'What 's that? What did she say?' And Mis' Marshall says, 'She said the meetin' would please come to order,' and Mis' Harper says, 'What does she mean by that?' And Mis' Stebbins calls out: 'Tell her I mean for her to keep still.' So Mis' Marshall yelled that into the trumpet, and ol' Mis' Harper grunted and took out a pep-mint lozenge, and begun to munch on it.

"Then Mis' Stebbins says: 'The secretary will please read the minutes of the last meetin'.'

"Nobody said anything and then Mis' Blake spoke up and says: 'What do you mean by that?'

"'La sakes!' says Mis' Stebbins. 'Do you mean to tell me you ain't got no secretary?'

"'There 's one upstairs,' says Mis' Blake, 'but I wa'n't never one to keep a writin' desk in the parlour. If you want a secretary, you 'll have to go upstairs where 't is. I ain't a-goin' to have it brung down here to be hammered on.'

"'I mean,' says Mis' Stebbins, very soft, 'the woman what keeps the records of the society. She writes down at every meetin' everythin' that 's said and done, and at the next meetin' she reads it out loud, so as them that was n't here can know what went on in their absence, and them as was here can refresh their memories.'

"Mis' Marshall spoke up then and says

Com-mittees

somethin' about its bein' no wonder they wanted a battle-tablet at the door of the Woman's Club, and Mis' Harper puts her ear-trumpet over and Mis' Marshall pushes it away from her. Every minute she was gettin' more mad.

"'If there are no objections,' Mis' Stebbins went on, 'the chair will appoint as a Committee on Constitution and By-laws, Mis' Blake, Mis' Marshall, and Mis' Harper, the committee to be ready with a report and a preliminary draft of the constitution at the next meetin'. And as a Committee on Nominations, the chair appoints Mis' Dunlap, Mis' Christy, and Mis' Warner'—that 's me.

"Mis' Harper, havin' heard her name and bein' unable to get anythin' out of Mis' Marshall next to her, gets up and comes over and puts the ear-trumpet into Mis' Stebbins' face and says: 'What 's that? What was you sayin' about me?' So Mis' Stebbins hollers into the ear-trumpet: 'I appointed you a member of the Committee on Constitution and By-laws with Mis' Blake and Mis' Marshall.'

"'Oh,' says Mis' Harper. 'My constitution ain't been very strong since I lost my hearin,' but I 'll do the best I can,' she says. 'Will you have a pep-mint?'

"'No, thank you,' says Mis' Stebbins into the trumpet. 'Please go back and set down where you was, by Mis' Marshall.'

Unfinished Business

"'Mebbe you'll enjoy it later on,' says Mis' Harper, layin' the pep-mint down on the table in front of Mis' Stebbins. Mis' Marshall had moved away from the sofy and was settin' on the stool in front of the melodeon, but Mis' Harper, havin' been told to set by her, goes out and gets a kitchen chair and drags it in and sets it down close by Mis' Marshall, with the ear trumpet good and handy on the melodeon.

"'If there are no minutes,' says Mis' Stebbins, 'we will proceed with the unfinished business.'

"'What's that?' says Mis' Blake.

"'Whatever was left over from the last meetin',' says Mis' Stebbins.

"Mis' Dunlap spoke up then, and says, 'If I recollect, it was at my house, and there wa'n't nothin' left over but a little piece of pound cake and mebbe half a cup of tea.'

"You know Mis' Dunlap is stingy and Mis' Christy spoke out and says: 'Don't let it disturb you, Mis' Dunlap. I'm quite sure nothin' will be wasted, and I don't doubt you're still usin' them tea-grounds.'

"Mis' Stebbins pounded on the table with the hammer and beat off some more varnish—I dunno as a hot iron'll do it any good, and I reckon Mis' Blake will have to have it scraped and done over, and if I was her, I'd send the bill for it to Mis' Stebbins—and Mis'

New Business

Stebbins says again: 'The meetin' will please come to order.' I suppose she was mad because her relative was bein' sassed, even though it was only a relative by marriage.

"Mis' Harper had to be told what was bein' said, and then things got quiet again. Mis' Stebbins says: 'If there is no unfinished business before the house, we will proceed with the new business.'

"After this was put into Mis' Harper's trumpet, everybody was quiet but Mis' Christy. She was puttin' a patch into the next to the oldest boy's shirt, and she leans over and whispers to Mis' Blake that she 's used up all the patches she has and has been obliged to cut a piece out 'n the tail, and she reckons the shirt is like England's flag, cause the son ain't never goin' to set on it. Do you see any sense to that?"

"No," said Uncle Henry, seeing that an answer was expected. Two hot and dusty miles still lay between him and the land of biscuits and honey.

"No more do I, nor anybody else, but Mis' Stebbins pounded another nick in the varnish, and says: 'The meetin' will please come to order. What is the new business before the house?' But nobody said anythin'."

"Then Mis' Stebbins says, very haughty-like: 'Ladies, I see that the processes of parlimenty law are confusin' to beginners. Would

The Treasurer

one of you mind tellin' me, just as woman to woman, what this meetin' is held for?'

"'As there is no answer from the floor'—did you ever hear anythin' like that, Henry?—'I will ask Mis' Blake to tell me very briefly why this meetin' is held. As it is in her house, I presume she knows.'

"'We come,' says Mis' Blake, 'to decide what to do with the money in the treasury and to have a cup of tea.'

"'Oh,' says Mis' Stebbins. 'Now I know where I am. We will take up the disposal of the funds in the treasury. Ladies, what is your pleasure?'

"None of us was havin' any pleasure, as I see, so nobody said anythin', and Mis' Stebbins asked who the treasurer was. Mis' Blake said that there wa'n't no treasurer—that Mr. Marshall, bein' the minister, kept the money.

"'Where does he keep it?' asks Mis' Stebbins and Mis' Marshall spoke up and says: 'I don't know as it 's any of your business, but it 's in a wallet under the mattress in the spare room. There 's seventy-eight dollars and nineteen cents.'

"'Well,' says Mis' Stebbins, very patient, 'what is to be done with it? What is the pleasure of the meetin'?'

"Mis' Christy spoke up then, havin' finished the patch, and she says: 'I dunno. As my

A Disagreeable Meeting

oldest son says, "You c'n search me." This is the most disagreeable meetin' I 've ever had the misfortune to attend.'

"'Me too,' says Mis' Marshall; then, seein' that Mis' Blake had begun to feel bad, she says, very polite, 'and we all have such good times at Mis' Blake's house, too.'

"'What 's that?' says Mis' Harper, pokin' the ear-trumpet into Mis' Marshall's face.

"'I was just sayin',' Mis' Marshall yells into it, 'that we all have such good times at Mis' Blake's house,' and Mis' Harper smiles and nods at Mis' Blake and says: 'Yes—jes' so.'

"'Are there any suggestions to be made in regard to the disposal of this money?' asks Mis' Stebbins, and nobody says anythin'.

"Of course we all had our private idees, but we wa'n't goin' to explain 'em to Mis' Stebbins. Mis' Dunlap got up and says: 'I must ask to be excused, as I have a guest for dinner.' Yes, Henry, that 's what she said. Mis' Stebbins bein' there one night has changed 'company for supper' into 'guest for dinner.'

"Mis' Dunlap says good-bye to everybody, tellin' Mis' Stebbins that she don't need to hurry, but to stay as long as she 's enjoyin' herself, and after Mis' Blake come back from seein' her to the door, Mis' Stebbins says: 'If there is no new business to come before the house, a motion to adjourn will be in order.'

"Nobody says anythin' so Mis' Stebbins

The Downfall

says, 'Mis' Warner, will you please stand up and say: "I move we adjourn"?'

"So I stood up, and I says: 'I move we adjourn,' and Mis' Stebbins says: 'Mis' Christy, will you please stand up and say: "I second the motion"?' So Mis' Christy stands up and says: 'I second the motion,' and Mis' Stebbins says: 'If there is no objection, the meeting stands adjourned.'

"Just as she says that, she takes her last whack at the varnish with her hammer, and moves her chair back so quick that she catches one leg of it on a hole in the carpet and falls over backwards, and a whole lot of little sausages made of hair rolls off her head and all over the parlour floor. I 'd been suspectin' it was false, because I knowed no woman could ever make her natural hair look like that.

"After Mis' Stebbins and the sausages was picked up, we had tea that had stood on the grounds so long it was bitter, and we took turns talkin' into Mis' Harper's trumpet till it was time to go home and some had gone. Everybody was waitin' for Mis' Stebbins to go and finally she went, and just as she went some of those as had gone come back by way of the back door.

"Mis' Blake was at the door with Mis' Stebbins, and I heard her say, loud and clear: 'Mis' Stebbins, if that table and that hammer would be of any use to you, you 're quite wel-

"There'll Be Another"

come to take 'em with you. Neither of 'em is of any use to me, and I don't reckon they can be made so,' she says, and Mis' Stebbins went off awful mad with her hat over one ear.

"I don't blame Mis' Blake. The head kept comin' off the hammer and the table looked as though it had had the smallpox. If she uses it, she 'll have to keep it covered up. When I left, Mis' Harper was askin' everybody what a constitution was and Mis' Christy was tellin' her to look in the dictionary. It was a terrible excitin' meetin'. It was supposed to be the last, but I reckon there 'll be another, with Mis' Stebbins and Mis' Dunlap left out, though I don't know how we 're goin' to manage it without hurtin' somebody's feelin's."

"I reckon there will," mused Uncle Henry, as Molly turned into the shaded driveway of her own accord. "Did you say you was layin' out to have honey for supper, Mother?"

"Mebbe. I ain't been thinkin' much about supper."

"I saw the flour measured out in the pantry and the bakin' powder can down, so I knowed there was goin' to be biscuits. I 've always relished honey with hot biscuits, and sweet butter."

"So have I," murmured Aunt Belinda as she climbed out, at the back door. "You put Molly up, Father, and just as soon as I change my dress, I 'll get supper. If I think of any-

Consigned to Oblivion

thin' more that went on at the meetin', I 'll tell you while we 're eatin'."

"All right, Mother."

Uncle Henry was perfectly willing to let the remainder of the meeting rest in the eternal oblivion to which he fain would consign it, but he was too wise to say so—before supper.

XII

Midsummer Madness

A Present

CHANDLER was playing solitaire, that "last resource of the vacant mind." Margery sat near him, embroidering the last clover blossom upon a square of pale green linen destined for a sofa cushion. "There," she said, holding it up before him. "Is n't it pretty?"

Chandler nodded. "Not half as pretty as you are," was upon his lips, but he did not say it. Instead, he asked: "What 's it for?"

"It 's for them."

"Who is—or are—'them'?"

"Judith and—" Margery hesitated for an instant, then coloured faintly and added—"Mr. Keith."

"Oh! For a wedding present?"

"No—just because they 've been nice to me. I was in their house the other day, you know, and I thought I 'd like to make something for it. When it 's done, I 'm going to take it up there and leave it on one of the window

A Game

seats, for a surprise. They 'll never guess where it came from."

Chandler thought they would know instantly, but forebore to spoil Margery's pleasure by saying so. "Did you ever play that game," he asked, "where you assign to people you know the characteristics of a flower, and a musical instrument?"

"No—how do you do it?"

"I was just thinking that the clover blossoms suggested you, to anyone who knew you, but forget-me-nots would be better, they 're so like your eyes."

"And the musical instrument?" she queried. Like most very young women she was unfailingly interested in personalities.

"A mandolin," he said.

Margery folded up her finished work, stuck her needle into the upholstered arm of the chair in which she was sitting, and hung her thimble upon it. "What is Judith?"

"A scarlet poppy and her own harp."

"And Mr. Keith?"

Chandler hesitated. "It 's never quite so easy to place a man. A carnation, perhaps, and a clarinet. It 's your turn now. What is Miss Bancroft like?"

"A tea rose—a pale pink one, and either a flute or a violin—I don't know which."

"Violin," he said, half dreamily, "and I a broken 'cello." His face saddened as he spoke.

Personality and Environment

"What is Eliza?" asked Margery, with quick kindness.

"A cabbage," laughed Chandler, "and an accordion. There is no poetry to be connected with Eliza."

When Judith came that afternoon, wearing her scarlet gown to please Chandler, Margery greeted her playfully.

"Did your ears burn this morning? We were talking about you."

"That depends upon what you were saying. One is n't always safe, you know, even with one 's friends."

"That sounds like Miss Bancroft," commented Chandler. Judith had brought him a book, a small basket filled with strips of candied orange-peel, and a paper butterfly that clung to whatever it touched, waving its wings in a most lifelike fashion.

"Does n't it!" smiled Judith. "I don't believe you can live with other people and not absorb something from their ways of thinking and manner of expressing themselves. Moreover, Aunt Cynthia has a very penetrating personality."

"All strong natures have," Chandler answered. "Some people are shaped wholly by their environment, as plastic material conforms to the receptacle in which it is placed. Others mould their environment to meet the demands of individuality."

Almost Ready

"Can it be done?" asked Judith, thoughtfully.

"Always—if one is strong enough. From mysterious sources we draw to ourselves that which we require or expect. If a tree may lift into its trunk the materials for sap and fibre, and if the moon may control the tides, why should not thought, which is the most wonderful and powerful of forces, bring harmony into one's daily life, if not the absolute control of circumstances?"

Margery, frankly bored, tapped the veranda restlessly with a tiny foot, and Judith laughed.

"You 're getting into deep waters," she said, with ready tact, "where Margery and I can't follow you."

"Then tell me about yourself. What have you been doing?"

"Everything. I go to town every day now, like any business man, to buy furniture."

"Is the house done, then?"

"Practically. Carter says it 's the only house he ever heard of that would be ready before it was expected to be."

"Then—" Chandler hesitated a little—"that will hurry things, won't it?" He was fond of Carter, but for some reason he could not have put into words if he tried to do it, he rather dreaded to have Judith marry. Things might never be the same again—it 's the way of things not to be.

Judith had turned her face away. Her eyes, lifted toward the distant hills, had something of the rapt fervour of the mystic in their starry depths. The common things of every day had faded from her sight. Alone, with her own soul, she dwelt apart.

Margery looked at her in amazement, slightly tinged with awe, but Chandler understood. A woman and her dreams! With secret reverence he waited, until she came to herself with a start.

"I beg your pardon," she said, with a rush of colour staining her face. "I was wandering around in my Spanish Castles."

"Is the house furnished?" asked Margery.

"Almost. The inevitable piece of furniture is n't as yet upon the inevitable spot, but we can learn where things belong only by experience. You can build a house but a home must grow."

"Miss Bancroft again," said Chandler.

Judith nodded. "I 'm getting the epigram habit. Later on I shall progress to cryptic monosyllables and puzzling metaphors. Aunt Cynthia's conversation is n't merely talk. Most of the time she means something entirely the reverse of what she appears to be saying."

"Most women do, don't they?"

"I don't know." Judith fell to dreaming again, but recalled herself almost instantly. "I 'm absent-minded to-day," she said, in

smiling apology. "I 'm thinking about the house all the time."

"I wish you 'd tell me about it," said Chandler, earnestly. "Remember I 've never seen it and never shall."

"Have n't I been telling you, all along?"

"Yes, but I 've got confused. My mind is a mass of unrelated details. Begin at the beginning, won't you?"

"It begins on a terrace, overlooking the valley and the river. Outside, it 's just a cement bungalow, with a green-tiled roof, and a veranda opening off the living-room. Latticed windows, you know—that is, the upper sash.

"Inside, there 's a big living-room with a stone fireplace and an inglenook. Dull grey-green grass cloth on the walls, white net curtains, lots of built-in bookcases, and a big table with a reading lamp on it. Carter's den is n't touched, as yet. He says he wants to put his 'junk' into it a little at a time."

Judith went on, patiently, as she had done many times for Aunt Cynthia, from room to room. The "house love" which belongs to some rare women illumined her face and put music into her voice. One could see that all of it was dear to her, quite apart from Carter, and yet, in a way, because of him, for had they not builded it together, with a dream at the beginning, as there is at the beginning of everything worth while?

Borrowing Trouble

"Thank you," Chandler said, when she had ceased. "I see it all quite plainly now."

"We 'll have it photographed for you, as soon as it 's in order. Did I tell you that Aunt Cynthia might possibly come to live with us?"

"No," Chandler answered in a different tone. His little world seemed to be rearranging itself and proceeding in new ways, independently of him.

"I 'm afraid she won't," Judith sighed, "but Carter says she must. He threatens to kidnap her by automobile. Modern, is n't it?"

"Lochinvar up-to-date. Suppose the car should break down?"

"Oh, but it won't!"

"Is n't it a habit of automobiles?"

"Sometimes one is tempted to think so. We had a long walk back home last night. The car is far out on the East road at this blessed minute, waiting for somebody to tow it back where it can be repaired."

"Suppose Miss Bancroft had been in it?" queried Chandler.

"Don't borrow trouble, please. Aunt Cynthia says that when you borrow trouble you give your peace of mind as security. We 're late about getting to our work, are n't we?"

Judith went to the piano and ran her fingers idly over the keys. She took down the *Lo-*

Discontented Margery

hengrin music, first, then remembered that it had stirred up unhappy memories for Chandler, and immediately put it aside.

Margery sat and listened for a time, then went out into the yard. She was restless and unhappy and the strains of dance music that came from the house only accentuated the blackness of her mood. She took the embroidered cushion-cover into the kitchen, and asked Eliza to press it. Then, seized with a swift distaste for the whole thing, she hurried to the machine, sewed the two parts together, and stuffed the pillow in.

By the time she had finished it, she was glad it was done, and, for the moment, abandoned the idea of taking it to the house. She could give it to Judith as she was leaving—but, no—that would n't be nice, to burden Judith with her own gift. Sometime, perhaps, when they came up to take her out in the car—but when had they come to take her out? When would they come? Resentfully, Margery went to her dresser and shook out the shimmering lengths of rose and turquoise that had lain there so long, dazzling no eyes but her own. Perhaps, if she showed the veils to Judith, it might give her a pleasant idea.

Margery sat down in her low chair and kicked her small heels together nervously. Why were people in love always so abominably selfish? When she gave Judith the cushion

Margery's Plans

she might show her the veils—no, that would be altogether too pointed.

Mr. Keith had been so nice, that day they met in town! And the day he came to bring back the stockings, he had been so entirely different—so moody and sullen, and in such a hurry to get away! Judith had asked her to dinner only once, she had been in the car but twice, and nothing could be more lonely than to stay cooped up all the time in a little house with a man old enough to be her father—and a lame man at that.

Tears of conscious self-pity came into the blue eyes. Downstairs they were playing and would keep at it for an hour longer, if not two hours. She could go away, almost anywhere, and come back long before they missed her. A dormant sense of justice bade her ask herself why Judith should do for her more than she had, or why Mr. Keith should be expected to take a lonely little orphan out in his car.

Nevertheless, the music from below grated upon her abominably. The finished cushion confronted her with a sort of impertinent stare. She wanted to get rid of it immediately, but how? Then a bright idea came to Margery. Why not take it over to the house, now, and leave it? She would be back before they finished playing and they would never know she had been away. The surprise would be

Don't Wait!

complete, if either of them went to the house that night.

Smiling, and with an agreeable sense of adventure, Margery slipped out of the house and away from the tormenting tunes. She wore no hat, and was glad she had not burdened herself with it, for the sofa-cushion, unwrapped as it was, made a very awkward armful long before she reached her destination. Indeed, at the river, she seriously thought of turning back, then reflecting that she was already nearly half-way there, she sat down to rest a little before she went on.

Nobody in the house had seen her go, and Chandler and Judith were wholly absorbed in their music. When a lilting, laughing melody came to an abrupt ending in a full chord of sadness, and then by a swift modulation changed into a minor key, Chandler stopped.

Judith turned, wondering what was wrong. The man's eyes were fixed upon her in almost passionate pleading and a strange expression had come upon his face.

"Judith," he said huskily, "oh, my dear girl, take your joy! Don't wait—I beg of you not to wait!"

"What do you mean?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Don't wait! The minute the house is done, go—go with him! Don't wait!"

Judith's Dream

"Why?" she asked, with a queer little pang at her heart.

"Because things happen—so many thousand things might happen! When the cup of joy is once at your lips, drain it to the dregs! We are sure only of the things we have had!"

She ran her hands over the keys again carelessly, but the lovely face was slightly pale. "I like to go to it," she murmured, "at sunset, and alone, when nobody knows where I am. I like to think of all the love and laughter that some day will be there; of all the little household gods waiting, asleep, for the love that shall bring them to busy life. And the voices —oh! the little voices that I pray may come!"

Her own voice had died into a whisper, but the light in her eyes came from the very altar-fires of her womanhood. Then, swiftly, the divine moment passed.

"Little sunset House of Hearts,
Standing all alone—
I could come and sweep the leaves
From your stepping stone.

"I like to go there," she went on, in another tone, "and say it to myself. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes," muttered Chandler. "No one can understand better than I. But oh, my dear girl, don't wait!"

The words chimed with her steps as she

Through the Open Window

walked away, turning instinctively toward the little house, lonely upon its hillside, waiting, Judith fancied, for her coming. "Don't wait —don't wait—dear girl—don't wait." Every cricket chirped it at her as she passed, and even the birds leaned out from their leafy doors to sing at her: "Don't wait—don't wait—dear girl—don't wait."

It had not occurred to Margery that a finished house, almost entirely furnished, might be locked, but she did not want to carry the sofa-cushion back again, and she disliked the idea of leaving it upon the veranda. If it should be stolen, all her work would be useless, and never would she make another. Unaccustomed to sewing, her fingers were rough and pricked, and there was a long needle-scratch across the back of her left hand.

She went down into the basement, found a step-ladder left by one of the painters, and dragged it, with some effort, up to the kitchen window, which was not fastened. Inspired by the emotions that conceivably may sustain a burglar in his nocturnal enterprises, she went back to the veranda, got the cushion, and after two failures, succeeded in throwing it through the open window.

"Now to climb in," thought Margery, gleefully, "put it where it belongs, and come out again. How surprised they 'll be!"

Face to Face with Carter

Brushing off the dust, she took it into the living-room, laid it upon a window seat, and turned to go. Then she was assailed by temptation. "I don't believe it 's very nice of me," she said to herself, "but I do want to look at the rest of the house. Just one peep!"

She went through the bedrooms, pausing to admire the curtains and furniture, took an appreciative look at the dining-room, a rapid survey of the kitchen, and lingered for a few moments in the suite which she supposed would be assigned to Miss Bancroft should she go to live with them. It was a dear house—just such a house as Margery had always wanted herself.

When she went back into the living-room, she came face to face with Carter, who had just unlocked the front door. He stared at her, for a moment, in profound astonishment.

"Where 's Judith?" he asked, quickly.

"Up at Mr. Chandler's—playing."

"How did you come here?"

Margery pouted for a moment, then answered coolly: "I climbed in through the back window."

"Why did n't you get the key of the kitchen door from Judith?"

"She did n't know I was coming. It was a surprise."

Carter was looking at her with an odd expression upon his face. "I 'm very sorry,"

Margery stammered. "I suppose you think it is n't nice of me. Perhaps it is n't, but I assure you I have n't meant any harm. I only came to bring you that—" pointing to the cushion. "I made it myself, and I wanted to bring it, and not tell anybody until you 'd both wondered where it came from."

The blue eyes were misty and almost child-like in their appeal. Carter took up the cushion and looked at it approvingly. "I say," be began, awkwardly. "Did you really make it yourself?"

"Every bit. And I pricked my fingers, too. See?"

Devoid of any impulse of coquetry, Margery extended her hands as she might have done to her father—or to Chandler, or even to Judith herself. But Carter did not see the rough finger tips and the long scratch. His eyes were upon hers, and Margery translated the strange look into stern disapproval.

"I 'm sorry," she said, again. Her eyes brimmed now, and her sweet lips trembled. "Please forgive me, and I 'll go." She turned—but the man suddenly caught her in his arms. "Margery!" he breathed.

For a frightened instant she struggled, then yielded. Her lips met his in the first kiss she had ever given to any man save her father. "Margery!" he whispered. "Margery, dear!"

For a delirious minute he crushed her to

Judith Appears Unseen

him, knowing only that he held in his arms the one woman God had meant for him since the world was made, that no other woman could ever stir the unsounded depths of his soul. He had the sense of divine completion that comes to a man but once in his life, and which is never to be mistaken or denied. Over and above the riot of his senses, he knew that this was inevitable; that from the day he was born, every step had led him straight to Margery and that he had her at last.

The back door opened, but no one heard. Judith came into the dining-room, singing softly to herself. It might have been a lullaby stirring from her prayer for little voices, and the fairy patter of little feet.

She opened the door into the living-room—and still, no one heard. White and horror-stricken, she stood there for a blinding instant, then her nerveless hand dropped to her side. The door closed of its own accord.

Like a wounded animal seeking shelter Judith turned toward the white room—her own room. "No," she said to herself, in a shrill whisper—"not there!" She dragged herself to her own closet, locked the door on the inside, and sank to the floor, all her senses merged into one unspeakable hurt.

"Oh," said Margery, with a sob, breaking away from Carter. "How can you!"

Margery flees

"How can I not?" he answered. His face was as pale as Judith's had been, when she stood there in the door—unseen.

She looked at him for a moment, then, with faltering steps, went to the door. He followed her out of the house, and down the road. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but held her head proudly, though the tears were streaming down her face. A torrent of broken words came from Carter's lips, but Margery did not answer. Finally, he said, with the dogged stubbornness which was characteristic of him, "You need n't speak to me if you don't want to, but I shall at least see you safely home."

Margery ran, then, so fast that he could not keep up with her. He stopped at the river and watched until the flying little figure in blue turned at the cross-roads, never once looking back.

Shaken to the depths by a whirlwind of emotion, he wiped the cold perspiration from his face. "God!" he said to himself. "What shall I do?" Bitterly he added: "What can I do?"

He lingered upon the river bank until after dark. Nor did he see, in the gathering dusk, the pitiful figure in scarlet that crept past him in the kindly shadows, too deeply submerged in its own misery even to guess that he was there.

XIII

The Right Way

Carter Goes Through the Motions

WHEN Carter finally pulled himself together, it was almost eight o'clock. Without stopping to think of dinner, he went slowly to Miss Bancroft's, hoping, yet dreading, to see Judith. Her beautiful serenity had always calmed him. When with her he seemed to dwell in a higher atmosphere, beyond the power of mundane things to disturb or to annoy.

It did not occur to him to send an excuse, and indeed, what excuse could he send? He could not say he was ill, or busy, for he had never been ill a day in his life, and he never worked evenings—at least he had not since he fell in love with Judith.

The house was ominously silent. No friendly light beckoned from a window; no woman in a white gown waited in the shadow at the gate to put soft bare arms around his neck and murmur in a low voice that thrilled him to the depths of his soul: "Dear—my dear!"

Even Miss Cynthia was invisible. The maid said that Miss Judith had a headache

and had gone to bed. No, she had not been down to dinner.

Chaotic Emotions

Insensibly relieved, Carter turned away. He walked farther up the road, then came back. There was no light in Judith's room—nor in Miss Cynthia's. Except for the kitchen, the house was dark.

Memory stung him as with scorpions. "Cad!" he said to himself, angrily. "Coward, weakling, blind fool!" Chaotic emotions surged through him, yet, even then, he knew that his ultimate reckoning must come, not with Judith or Margery, but with himself.

It was the first time, since he had grown to manhood, that Carter had lost his self-control. Proudly he had kept the command of himself, with secret contempt for the weakness of those who could not. He shrank, frightened, from the thought that anything outside himself could direct even his smallest action.

Anxiously, he considered Judith. In the year and more of their engagement, he had never known her to have a headache, nor to deny herself to him upon any pretext whatever. Above coquetry and the use of small feminine weapons, she met him openly and frankly as a man might. Always they stood upon equal terms, yet, because she was all woman, even in her frankness, she commanded his loyalty.

A flood of it surged upon him now, drowning,

A Vivid Picture

for the moment, every tormenting thought. He went back to the day they met—when he came out to Edgerton to find a place where he might live reasonably and quietly, while, in yonder roaring city, he made daily offerings upon the altar of the god Success.

Someone had told him to go to Mrs. Warner's—but he could not remember who. Judith had been there, talking to the old people. Uncle Henry had hurt his foot, and the injured member had been wrapped in flannel and propped up on a chair. Judith had taken him a book and a picture puzzle, and was teaching him to play solitaire while she chatted with Aunt Belinda upon congenial topics.

Vividly, as though it were yesterday, the picture appeared before him—the exquisite cleanliness and peace of the whole place, from the white picket fence around the yard to Aunt Belinda herself, matronly and kind, enveloped in a spotless white apron. He remembered how she had at first mistaken him for a book agent and refused to admit him until he had spoken the talismanic name that had wreathed Aunt Belinda's face in smiles. Who was it, anyway? Queer that he should forget that and remember everything else!

And Uncle Henry—wearing the martyr-like expression of the man who is slightly ill, sitting in the best rocker in the centre of the parlour, with his sore foot upon the softest chair,—the

pivot upon which the entire household revolved. Carter remembered the mild blue eyes that peered sharply at him from over the steel bowed spectacles, the scanty white hair that stuck out all over his head because he had refused to let Aunt Belinda brush it or to do it himself, and the full grey beard, irregularly trimmed, because he had done it himself, with the aid of the kitchen scissors and the cracked mirror that hung over the sink.

Five years ago, almost—yet it seemed as though it were only the day before. He remembered he had gone upstairs with Aunt Belinda, and how gratefully the lavender-scented stillness of the front room had appealed to his weary senses. Then, having come to terms with her, he went down—to find that Judith was leaving, in spite of Uncle Henry's loud-voiced protests and the shrill assertion that he could n't play the game yet by himself and what was he to do.

Smilingly, Judith had suggested the picture puzzle and the book and promised to come again to-morrow. For the first time, then, Carter noted the cool depths of her voice—the full, vibrant contralto that sounded through the rooms like the swept strings of a harp. He had asked if he might not walk home with her, since it would be an hour before the next train to town, and she had assented as readily—and as unemotionally—

A Bunch of Violets

as though she had been a man, or he a woman.

It was Spring then and he had never forgotten the long walk upon the good brown earth and the young grass, the scent of the blossoming willows that overhung the river and the mute aspiration upward even of the clods. The flutter of swift wings past him, the tranquil clouds that were reflected upon the rippling surface of the river, murmuring with full, low music toward the ultimate sea, that, with its siren call, lures every stream on earth into its arms—the day came back, pitilessly, to confront him now.

Though hitherto not given to sentiment, Carter had kept that day the bunch of violets Judith had taken from her belt and offered him as they stood at the white gate hung upon posts in the midst of the box hedge that surrounded Miss Cynthia's house. The pungent odour of the box never failed to bring before him Judith's frank, sweet eyes, as she said, "Just a little breath of country to last you until you get to town. Won't you come in and meet my Aunt?"

"Thank you, no," he had answered, a little confused. "I haven't time now, but I 'll come very soon, if I may."

With the merest nod of assent, she said good-bye and left him. That had been the beginning of a long, happy comradeship which

at last had ripened into love. He had liked Miss Cynthia at once, and keenly enjoyed the barbed shafts she sped at him. At first it had been merely pleasant to go there when he was lonely: later he found himself, in the midst of the afternoon, looking forward to the evening which would bring him to Judith. When he asked, once, if he did not bore them by coming so often, Miss Cynthia had assured him, most heartily, that he could not, and even Judith had echoed her assertion with a soft, "No—indeed, no!"

So it had gone on. Gradually she became his solace, then his necessity. He took his unhappy moods to her, his failures, and even his temptations. One night, when two ways lay before him and on the morrow he must choose which one he would take, Judith had settled it for him in one clear sentence: "When you 've once seen which way is the right way, it ought never to be hard to choose."

Hundreds of times it had come back to him, and, at crucial moments of his career, had never failed to appear before him. To-night it confronted him with double force.

"The right way," he muttered—"where is it? If I knew, I 'd take it."

He saw now as never before how much he owed Judith. Subtly she had seemed to demand the best from him, and, loyally, he had given it to her. Long ago he had seen that

The Night of Their Betrothal

however high he might climb, Judith would still beckon to him from heights of her own. He had known, also, that into whatever darkness he might be plunged, Judith would be beside him—with a light.

A certain bitter comfort came from the thought. To go to Judith and tell her everything—to let her heal the hurt that he himself had done to his manhood—why not?

He stopped to think, then his question answered itself. Only a cad would betray one woman to another, and, moreover, why should he hurt Judith for the sake of his own relief?

Clear and distinct, the night of their betrothal urged itself into his misery, remotely, as though it belonged to another life. Judith's sweet serenity had not been disturbed; she seemed, indeed, to have expected it, and taken it as a matter of course. Crimson with embarrassment which the kindly shadows of the veranda concealed, he had stammered out the few necessary words, and Judith, with a laugh that was more like music than anything else, had yielded herself to his open arms without a word. The first kiss, passionless, as the first kiss usually is, then the next when he crushed her to him hungrily, and Judith, awake at last, had answered him from the depths of her inmost soul, as Margery——

Carter shrank from himself. "Beast that

A Staggering Question

I am—to be comparing the way in which two women have kissed me! Have I fallen so low as that?"

He had paced back and forth along the river bank for more than an hour, thinking. Through force of habit he went back to Miss Cynthia's and walked up and down under the long row of maples across the street from the house. There was still no light, but a tall figure in white was upon the veranda that opened out from the sitting-room, at the side of the house overlooking the garden. It was not Miss Cynthia, for, as he looked, it rose from its chair, and dragged itself the length of the veranda without the assistance of a crutch. The whole aspect of it was so utterly changed, however, that he would scarcely have known it was Judith, had it not been for the heavy veil of hair, that, deep as midnight, hung far below her waist.

"Poor girl," he said to himself. "What can be wrong?" Then, upon the instant, a question staggered him: "Did she know? Could she have seen?"

His stiff lips smiled a little at the thought, for Margery had said that she was up at Chandler's playing, so how could she have been in the house? Upon the face of it, the thing was absurd, and yet—his sixth sense made him wonder, in spite of his reason.

As he stood there, the white figure upon the

The New Emotion

upper balcony turned and crept into the house —bent and broken, as though it had all at once grown old. Presently, from the other side of the house, a light streamed out into the scented darkness for a moment, then disappeared.

With a sigh he turned away—sorry for Judith, who was evidently so ill, or unhappy, or both, and bitterly ashamed of himself. Yet above it all, dominant, compelling, rose man's supreme passion—that for his mate. With the touch of Margery's lips his world had changed, and would never be the same again. His feeling for Judith was unchanged; rather, with the new emotion, it had been accentuated if that were possible, but the blinding sun had risen upon one who had known only starlight before.

For a wild moment he considered going to Judith and asking for release, then craftily wondered whether it would not be wise to make sure of Margery first, then was shaken from head to foot by the realisation of his soul's debasement.

Instinctively relieving his mind by wearying his body, he walked on and on, down the road he had taken that afternoon, when Margery had run ahead of him, so fast that he could not keep up with her, and had been obliged, in a few moments, to give up an undignified and hopeless pursuit.

Which Way?

Her face was wet with tears when he saw it last, and her blue eyes blind with mist. Her mouth worked piteously in the last instant—before she broke away from him and started home. The memory of her choking sobs filled his heart with remorseful tenderness. What of Margery? What was she thinking now?

When he came to the cross-roads, where Chandler's lantern hung, he stopped to look up at the little blue sailor that guarded the weather-vane. The painted smile that had hitherto seemed cheery was a hideous mockery now. "At the cross-roads," said Carter to himself. "Which way, old man—which way?"

Very slowly the sailor turned, in answer to a vagrant breeze, and squarely faced Margery's window, where every light still burned brightly, though the rest of the house was dark.

"You 've turned your back to the right way," Carter thought, "but I must n't—I can't!"

Dimly, through the maze of things, he had begun to see what he must do. Judith's words came back to him, imperiously: "When you 've once seen which way is the right way, it ought never to be hard to choose."

In spite of the blue sailor, Carter had seen the right way, in a flash of insight that had made him marvel why he had not seen it be-

Margery Weeps

fore. White-faced and weary, for it was past midnight now, he turned back, pausing at the river to strain his eyes toward the cross-roads, where the lantern twinkled like some great star and above it, deeper in the darkness, Margery's light still shone.

None of the three had eaten dinner, nor would any of the three sleep. When Margery ran into the house, sobbing, Chandler had called to her gently: "Margery! Margery dear!"

Carter's own words, in another voice and in another place and with a wholly different meaning! In a tumult of pain she had stopped only to ask: "Has she gone?"

"Yes, long ago."

With a fresh rush of tears she had gone upstairs and locked her door, leaving Chandler in grieved amazement. "What could possibly have happened?" he asked himself again and again—"What could possibly have happened?"

Having dried her tears and calmed herself in the sweet solitude of the room Judith had taken such pains to furnish for her, Margery sat down to think. First love, dawning with the first kiss, stabbed into her heart with poignant pain. It did not occur to her that Carter had been cruel, or unkind, or even disloyal to Judith—something that had to be had happened, that was all. It was written in the

Taken by Surprise

stars that she should meet him as she had done, by the contriving of neither, that he should want to kiss her, and should do it.

Presently he would marry Judith, and everything would be as it had been before, save in her own heart. She told herself repeatedly that Carter would forget—that men always forgot. Had not Father told her, since the day she put on long skirts, that a man meant nothing until he said: "I love you—will you marry me?" Had he not sternly bade Margery remember it? Had he not told her that no nice girl allowed herself to be kissed by any man who had not said that? And once, when Margery had asked, half-shyly, "But suppose a girl is taken by surprise?" Father had bitten his lips, trying to conceal a smile, before he said, more gently: "A girl is never so much surprised, my dear, that there is not time to say 'no' in a way that leaves no doubt as to whether she means it."

It came to her with a sort of shock that Father could ever be wrong about anything. Unmistakably, she had been surprised; she had never even dreamed of such a thing, until——

Then Margery fell to dreaming of Judith and of the dear little house. How happy she must be to have it—and Mr. Keith. In Margery's thoughts he had always been "Mr. Keith." She could not imagine herself using his first name with careless freedom, yet Judith always

Margery's Thought of Judith

spoke of him quite casually as "Carter," just as he said "Judith," and "Margery."

She had not noticed that he had never called her "Miss Gordon" since the first time he spoke to her. She was "Margery" to everybody—perhaps because she was so young. It came to her now, with an odd little stir in her heart, that if he said "Margery," perhaps she might say "Carter."

"Carter," she said aloud, to see how it would sound. "Carter Keith." Judith's name would be "Mrs. Carter Keith," after they were married. At once Judith was set apart from all other women in the world, because she was to be "Mrs. Carter Keith."

Not in the least realising what had happened to her, and fearing that Chandler would be lonely, she went downstairs, though she did not care for dinner, and said so. Chandler asked if she were tired and she said, absently, that she was. When he spoke, she answered him in monosyllables. While he finished his dinner, she stood there, hesitating.

"Margery dear," said Chandler, kindly, "what is it? Is it anything you can tell me?"

She looked at him for a moment, then her eyes filled and she turned her face away. "No," she replied, with trembling lips. "I—I want my mother, that 's all!" She choked on the words, fled upstairs again, and locked her door.

The darkness frightened her rather than soothed her. She lighted her lamp and every candle in the room, then curled up on her couch, staring at the lights.

She longed for her mother as she said, but presently she became aware that she longed more intensely for Carter. Only to be in his arms again—for just an instant; to be kissed just once more, and then to say good-bye, and not see him until after he and Judith were married.

"Married!" The thought set every nerve thrilling to its own torture. Then, out of the maze of torment came knowledge. "Oh," she murmured, hiding her face in her hands, "I love him—indeed I do!" Then she added, to herself, "I wonder if he knows!"

Carter, tossing uneasily from side to side of his bed, was thinking of nothing else, aside from his own emotion and the things he had to do. He had been cruel to Margery, perhaps, but not unjust—the thing had to be, and it was; there was nothing more to it.

When the carrier pigeon came to his window, he had not been asleep at all. Common decency demanded that he should send a line to Judith, and yet, what was there to say? What could a man say when the girl he was going to marry had a headache?

Finally he wrote, "I 'm so sorry you were ill, dear. Are you better now?—C. K."

A Note and Pink Roses

He waited at the window until the bird came back, with the brief answer. "Yes, thank you. That is, I think so.—J. S."

Somewhat refreshed by his cold bath, he sat down, after he had dressed, to write a note to Margery. It was late, but he could not write in his office, and did not care whether he missed the train or not. At length, after many attempts, he achieved this:

"My Dear Miss Gordon:

"I trust you will forgive me for my unpardonable offence of yesterday. I have no excuse to offer; indeed, I know there is none. I most humbly beg your pardon. I suppose you do not want to see me again, but it is inevitable, under the circumstances, that we should meet occasionally. For Judith's sake, if not for mine, will you try to forgive and forget?

"Sincerely yours,

"Carter Keith."

It sounded brusque and even unfriendly, as he read it over. He could n't post it, on his way to the train, as he had first intended; there must be some more graceful way of offering an apology. A florist's window, in town, presented him with an idea. He sent it out to her that afternoon, enclosed in a box of pink roses.

XIV

The One Woman

AFTER the pigeon had gone back to Carter with her answer to his note, Judith fell into an uneasy sleep, waking at intervals from dreams that mocked her, to a shuddering reality. It was long past noon when she began to dress.

Miss Cynthia's Tact

Miss Cynthia was in the garden, with a book, making a sorry pretence at reading. When Judith came home the night before, in the dusk that shielded her white face, Miss Cynthia had gracefully accepted her explanation as to a headache, which is woman's friend as often as it is her enemy. Tactfully she ascribed it to the long walk in the sun, following upon late hours of the night before, but did not fail to notice that Judith winced at the vague allusion to Carter.

Afterwards, when she was alone, Miss Cynthia remembered that in the ten years and more that she and Judith had lived together, the girl had never had a headache, nor, indeed, more than a single day's illness at a time.

Secretly Disturbed

Her feminine instinct scented trouble, and yet—what could it be?

Surely she had not quarrelled with Carter, for he had come as usual the night before, and Judith had been happy all day—until she came home from Chandler's. And that very night Carter had come, and was disappointed, the maid said, not to see Miss Judith. Thus she had translated his involuntary sigh of thankfulness.

Miss Cynthia had been tempted to go down and talk to him herself, but thought the sound of their voices, however low, might annoy Judith, and moreover, Carter had not asked for her. So she sat alone all the evening, in the sitting-room upstairs, without a light, musing upon the mysterious ways of people in general and of men in particular.

Secretly disturbed, Miss Cynthia had passed a troubled night also. Now and then, upon the maple tree just outside her window, the faintest possible light shone—the merest suggestion of the candle that burned in Judith's room. Presently it would disappear and Miss Cynthia would sleep again, but never for long. Fitfully, as the night waned, she woke and slept, anxious for Judith and wondering what could possibly be wrong.

When the carrier pigeon fluttered past her window, on his way to Judith's room, she had a vague premonition that the tide of emotion

Miss Cynthia Seeks Information

had turned and that Judith would sleep now. As she dressed Miss Cynthia scouted the idea that Carter had anything to do with Judith's unhappiness. She had never known him to fail even in the smallest way. He had kept Judith surrounded, constantly, with the evidence of his devotion.

During the morning, Miss Cynthia bade the maid leave her dishes and attire herself for the street. Then she wrote a note to Chandler:

"DEAR FRIEND:

"Can you tell me what happened to Judith yesterday? She left here at half-past one, happy and contented. She came back at half-past seven, white as a sheet, and the merest ghost of herself. I thought she had stayed to dinner at your house. She said she had a headache—but she never has headaches and I am troubled. She is still in bed. Please answer by bearer, and oblige.

"CYNTHIA BANCROFT."

Under the address she wrote: *Confidential,* and underscored it heavily.

In an hour the maid came back with the answer:

"MY DEAR MISS BANCROFT:

"Judith came at two as usual, and was altogether like herself. She went away at five.

None of Her Affair

Nothing happened here, I am sure, for she was not out of my sight. I am very sorry that she is ill and shall be quite as anxious as you are.

"Margery went out while Judith was here and had not returned when she left. Margery came home about six in a tempest of tears. She ate no dinner and her light burned all night. She, too, is still in bed. Something must be wrong. If you find out, will you tell me? This also is confidential.

"Sincerely,

"MARTIN CHANDLER."

"Margery," said Miss Cynthia to herself, tearing the note into bits. What could make two women weep, except a man? And what man was there, save Carter?

For the moment she struggled with the temptation to call up Carter's office and have it out with him at long distance. Then she reflected that, after all, it was none of her affair, and that most things would work themselves out to a happy conclusion if people in general were not so eager to give assistance that was neither asked for nor needed. So much of the trouble in the world is not caused by those who keep their mouths shut!

And yet—between five and half-past seven, something had changed Judith from a beautiful and happy woman, who gave out joy as a flower gives fragrance, into a lifeless counter-

Plunged into Chaos

part of herself. Miss Cynthia remembered, with a shudder, how the scarlet gown in the dusk had been the colour of blood. The deadly white face above it and the wistful, appealing eyes still haunted her.

The garden itself was the abode of serenity and peace. Miss Cynthia sighed as she looked about her, from the shrubs that were past their blossoming time to the mass of larkspur that had budded, and, in a day, would break into starry bloom.

The house, with its double-decked veranda, seemed to her more like a stranded ocean-liner than ever—the life within having come to disaster upon some sunken reef. Yet nothing was happening! Butterflies floated back and forth in the warm still air, lazily. Birds twittered in the boughs over her head, cheerfully busy at their housekeeping amid the green leaves, and the hum and whirr of the manifold life about her went on unceasingly, without hint of trouble.

Nevertheless, she had been plunged overnight into chaos. The undercurrents might be calm and steady, pursuing their destined course through deep, smooth channels of sea, but above, rocked and shaken by tempestuous surges, one ship, at least, was fighting its way to the harbour.

Miss Cynthia determined to be very kind and to ask no questions. If she could

The Morning After

find out, tactfully, where the trouble lay, perhaps——

Judith came out of the house, slowly, dragging a favourite chair toward the spot where Miss Cynthia sat. The old lady instinctively half rose to help her, then settled back among her cushions with a sigh. When, for a time, she forgot her dependence upon her crutch, the need of it was forced upon her more sharply than ever.

As Judith approached, she tried to smile, but there were pitiful lines around her mouth. "Now," said Miss Cynthia to herself, "she 'll tell me, in one way or another—most likely another."

Judith's lacy white gown was open at the throat, rippling away toward her shoulders in a mass of frills. Her dark hair hung far below her waist in a single heavy braid. She was pale, but not quite colourless. At the first glance, Miss Cynthia shrank from her pitiful, burning eyes.

Judith spoke first. "I 'm sorry to be so late. I believe I 'm getting lazy."

"How is your headache, dear ?"

"My headache ?" Judith frowned, and in an instant recollected her last night's excuse. "It 's better," she said, wearily, "but not quite gone."

"Have you had breakfast ?"

"No. I did n't care for any."

Coffee in the Garden

Miss Cynthia tinkled the silver bell that she kept by her. "We 'll have coffee here," she said. "A good strong cup of coffee is sometimes a charm against evil spirits."

Judith hesitated, but did not refuse the steaming cup when it came. A bit of colour appeared upon her cheeks and the scarlet of her lips deepened.

"There," smiled Miss Cynthia, "that 's better. Won't you have an egg and some buttered toast ?"

"No, thank you."

Judith leaned back in her chair, turning a little, so that she faced the hill. Then she remembered that the House of Hearts stood at the foot of it, and with a shudder moved her chair. She was directly facing the house now, with her pure, proud profile in Miss Cynthia's line of vision.

The older woman took up her book and turned the pages listlessly.

Presently Judith asked, without interest: "What are you reading ?"

"Abelard and Heloise. The old books are the best, like old wine—and old friends."

"Quoting from motto cards, dear ?"

"Why not ? Are n't they meant to be quoted from ?"

"I presume so. There seems to be no other use for them. I detest a lot of little mottoes stuck up around a place."

Christmas Gifts

"So do I."

"Somebody had sent Mr. Chandler a batch of them yesterday. He was not amused, but he said the misguided person who did it had doubtless intended to be kind."

"I expect he 'll surround himself with them, then—to save hurting anyone's feelings."

Judith nodded. Without seeming to, Miss Cynthia was watching her closely, in search of a clue.

"I never was one to put an ugly thing into my house to please anybody else," she went on. "I 've often wondered what our Christmas letters would be like, if we all told the exact truth."

"Christmas would come to an end in two or three seasons, as far as gifts are concerned."

"In one, Judith dear. You remind me of the Irishman who said that if women refused to marry, the whole race would die out in three or four generations."

Judith did not smile. The slightest tremor ran through her body; the faintest shadow crossed her face.

"Matrimony," thought Miss Cynthia. "Woman's one great trouble. First to marry, and get something to worry about, then to escape from it and get rid of the worry." She recalled Stevenson's allusion to the long straight road that lay before one, hot and dusty, to the grave, speculated for a moment

Miss Margery

upon the general subject of divorce, then reverted to the cemetery, where nobody worried about anything.

Or did they worry? She remembered Kipling's poem about the lovers in India, who rode rapidly at midnight past the cemetery, and the dead stirred in their graves, because "love rode abroad that night." And there was something else—"it is death that is the guide of our life, and our life has no goal but death." Why did n't somebody have that inscribed over the entrance to a cemetery, where marrying and giving in marriage were of no account, as in heaven?

In an instant her thought had come back to Judith, pale, silent, staring before her with eyes that did not see. She tried another avenue of approach.

"Why does n't Mr. Chandler give the motto-cards to Miss Margery? She can pin them up on the curtains and disfigure the walls of her own room. If the donor impends he can ask her to bring them down. Girls like that sort of thing, as a rule."

At the sound of the talismanic name, Judith paled perceptibly. Affecting not to see, Miss Cynthia prattled on:

"Why does n't Miss Margery come to see me? She 's never been here but twice. While you 're up there, she can come here, can't she? It 's not fair for him to have you both at once."

The Only One

"I suppose she could," Judith replied, almost inaudibly. "I—I 'll see about it."

"Margery and matrimony," thought Miss Cynthia. "Consequently Carter, and nothing else. What can he have been doing?" She picked up the book she had been reading.

"I 've always liked this," she continued, calmly. "The thing is so eternally and beautifully just. Here 's Abelard, bravely set forth on the path of glory, living only because of the love of the woman he cast aside."

Judith sprang to her feet, her eyes ablaze. Primitive Woman within her, sleepless and on guard, broke into impassioned speech:

"But oh, Aunt Cynthia, to be the one woman! Tortured, abused, neglected—even starved and beaten if a man so chooses! To answer man's inexplicable need of cruelty—to be hurt, as a man must always hurt the woman he loves, but to *know*, always to *know* yourself as the one woman! To take it all, standing, as a brave man takes a blow, because there 's no face in his heart but yours, no touch but yours to stir him, no breast but yours for him to come to when his world is wrong! And when there never has been any other woman, and when you know, as truly as you know there 's a God, that there never can be, that sickness, mutilation, poverty, failure, and the thousand other things Life may bring you count for nothing there—that even death

is no denial—oh, Aunt Cynthia, how a woman could cross the desert on her knees for the man who would give her that!"

Pitifully shaken, Judith dropped into her chair. She laughed hysterically, then hid her face in her hands.

"Precisely," said Miss Cynthia, half to herself. "Exactly. That 's it."

Mistaking her meaning, Judith turned. "How do you know?"

"I had it," answered the old lady grimly, startled for the moment into revelation. "I was the one woman—once—for an hour. So I know."

There was an instant's tense silence. Questioning, and even pleading, Judith's eyes sought hers, but the open way between them closed suddenly. Subtly, Judith felt that a door had been slammed in her face.

"You 're an intensely monogamous person," said Miss Cynthia, with an abrupt change of tone. "Feminine instinct, according to the books. The more feminine, the more monogamous, and so on. Conversely, the more polygamous a man is, the more masculine he is. That 's the cause of the eternal tragedy. Woman is a continuous design; man is polka dots, and society tries to make one harmonious garment out of the two."

"Polka dots!" echoed Judith.

"I said polka dots, dear. Large number

Polka Dots

of small affairs scattered on the background of his more serious pursuits. Separated, distinct, and apart. Man's supreme effort to keep 'em so. No desire to have any one of the polka dots commune with another, and, as it were, compare notes. The thing does n't wash. Have n't you ever seen polka dots that would n't stand boiling and ran all over the background and into each other ?

"That sort of man has made a mess of his life. He 's sued for breach of promise, or divorce, or something. Anyhow, he has his love-letters read in court. Crowning humiliation for any man, except being hung or electrocuted. Did you ever read a love-letter that was n't an evidence of idiocy—except your own ?

"Upon the whole," mused Miss Cynthia, receiving no answer, "dry cleaning is safer, but most women are possessed with a mad desire to test a man's love. They want to take a sample of the polka dots, and boil it in soapsuds and put it in the sun, just to see what will happen. Nine times out of ten, it 'll run; anyhow, it 's going to fade, so why bother with it ? Anything will break if it falls far enough; anything is coarse if you put it under a microscope. Follow anything far enough and disillusion will hit you in the face, get far enough away and everything is lovely, unless there 's too much light. Women ought to pray for

Light on the Situation

near-sighted souls, but they're for ever looking at men through a sort of spiritual telescope. It does n't do."

"Your metaphors are confused," commented Judith, soberly.

"Why not?" demanded Miss Cynthia, briskly. "Everything else is."

"It 's getting late," resumed Judith, after an interval of silence. "I must go in and dress. I 'm ashamed of myself for being so lazy."

"Ask Ellen to come here if you see her, will you please?"

"Certainly."

With an effort, Miss Cynthia preserved her outward appearance of calm until Judith had gone into the house. Then she sat up, and rang her little silver bell violently.

"Paper and envelopes, please," she said to the maid, who came in response to a double summons. "And get yourself ready to go out."

Hurriedly, she wrote to Chandler, without the formality of a beginning:

"She 's told me but she does n't know it. He 's making love to them both.—C. B."

Chandler puzzled over the message for a few minutes, then queried, on the back of Miss Cynthia's monogrammed half-sheet of paper:

"Who 's told you? Who 's making love to whom? Don't understand. Please answer.—M. C."

Back and Forth

"Here, wait a minute," Miss Cynthia called to the retreating maid. "Take this right back." Under his questions she wrote:

"Judith. Carter. Judith and Margery. Get it? Some men can be told things and others require kindergarten demonstration with beads."

Expecting no more than the briefest possible reply, Miss Cynthia was dozing in her chair when the weary maid came back with this:

"Yes—at last. I fear you think me stupid. Somebody sent Margery a big box of pink roses this afternoon with a note which made her cry. I haven't seen her since. What would you do?"

"Here," called Miss Cynthia. "You'll have to go back with the answer."

It was twenty minutes' walk to Chandler's, the road was dusty, and the day was hot. Flesh and blood rebelled at the suggestion.

"I'll go, Miss Bancroft, if you want me to, but I think I'll leave in the morning. I'm a housemaid, not a messenger."

"All right—suit yourself." Miss Cynthia was ruffled, but not by a thing so slight as that. "Get me a telegraph blank, will you?"

She wrote, to Chandler: "Pray for Judith. I'm going to. That's all there is to be done."

On the telegraph blank she wrote, to one of the employment bureaus in town miscalled "an intelligence office": "Send me five new

Chandler Takes Action

maids immediately. Will keep two or three and pay expenses of outing. This one too weak to walk and very impertinent."

"Leave this at the telegraph office, please, as you pass it on the way to Mr. Chandler's, and speak to the expressman about your trunk. You came here to do whatever you were asked to do, and not to tell me what you would do and what you would n't. At present, I 'm managing this place. No—you need n't say anything—it 's not necessary."

A careless wave of the hand sufficed for dismissal. Chandler did not answer Miss Cynthia's note. When Margery failed to appear at dinner, he took matters into his own hands, and wrote a message of quite another sort:

"My Dear Carter:

"I suppose you 'll think it 's none of my business, but I don't know whose it is if it is n't mine. Would you mind telling me why you send Margery roses, and notes that make her cry? She 's been miserable ever since yesterday. If you can enlighten me, I 'll be much indebted to you.

"Sincerely,

"Martin Chandler."

It was very late when the answer came back:

"My Dear Mr. Chandler:

"I offended Margery, quite unwittingly,

Very Strange

and apologised for it. I 'm very sorry she 's unhappy.

"Yours,
"C. K."

By the same messenger, Carter sent a note to Judith, saying that he had worked hard all day, was very tired, and unless she wanted to see him especially, would go to bed early instead of coming over. He hoped she was well, and looked forward to seeing her to-morrow evening, and, as always, he was hers to command.

He rather expected an answer, but there was none.

In the morning the pigeon flew from window to window, without being admitted at either place or receiving a message to carry. Besides, there was no corn. He sat apart from his fellows all day, brooding over it. Certainly, it was very strange!

XV

The Documents in Evidence

Aunt Belinda Is Worried

AUNT BELINDA came out upon the back porch with her blue gingham apron full of string beans. Uncle Henry, busy for once, was mending the harness, and she observed it with satisfaction.

"Reckon this 'll be about the last time this can be mended," he said. "Molly 's got to have a new suit of clothes before long, same 's I have."

Aunt Belinda clicked her teeth together sharply, but made no other audible comment. A frown had spoiled the calm smoothness of her forehead and there were unwonted lines about the corners of her eyes.

"Henry," she said irrelevantly, "I 'm worried about him."

"What for? He ain't sick, is he?"

"I dunno. This morning he only et one sausage and when I told him he 'd have to run if he made his train, he said he did n't care whether he made it or not."

"Well," said Uncle Henry, after a pause. "What of it?"

On His Bureau

Aunt Belinda's mouth closed into a thin tight line. "Nothin'," she replied, with ill-concealed sarcasm.

Perceiving that he was expected to seem interested, he dropped the harness and folded his hands. "What is it, Mother? What 's gone wrong?"

"I ain't said nothin' about it, because I ain't one to talk les'n there 's something to talk about, and if there was more that was that way, this world would be a peacefuller place than what 't is."

"Jes so, Mother," approved Uncle Henry. "Jes so."

"A spell ago, he had women's stockin's on his bureau—silk they was, and fancy—pale blue and awful small."

"Well," said Uncle Henry, undisturbed, "what of it?"

"What of it? Henry Warner! Do you mean to tell me you think it 's proper for any young man, much less one that 's engaged to be married, to have women's stockin's on his bureau?"

"I ain't thought nothing about it. It ain't none of our—that is—my business, as I see. If he 'd been ashamed of 'em, he 'd have hid 'em—he would n't have left 'em on the bureau. And if he 'd done anythin' wrong he 'd have been ashamed of it—you know that, Mother, just as well as I do."

In the Waste-Basket

"I reckon he would. I had n't thought of that."

"Then you ain't got no call to worry, Mother—not as I see."

"I ain't told you the rest. He ain't slept for two nights. I 've heard him walkin' around and strikin' a light and gettin' up to put it out again. Soon 's I 'd get to sleep, he 'd wake me up, walkin' around. And do you know what time 't was when he come in night before last?"

Uncle Henry shook his head.

"Course you don't. You don't know nothin' from the time you get into bed until breakfast is ready. If burglars was minded to do it, they could carry you out and leave you in the middle of the street, and you 'd never know it. It was most half-past two when he come in and he ain't never stayed at her house that late."

Silence ensued, of the intense variety. "Well," said Uncle Henry. He was about to add: "what of it?" but, luckily, thought better of it in time.

"And this morning," resumed Aunt Belinda, with suppressed excitement, "I emptied his waste-basket. There was things in there that would make anybody worry. There was half a dozen sheets of his best paper, some tore and some not tore, and all of 'em beginning either 'My dear Margery,' or 'My dear Miss

'Scraps of Letters'

Margery,' or 'My dear Miss Gordon.' On some of 'em he said he was very sorry for what happened yesterday, and on others he said he could n't truthfully say he was sorry, because it was something sweet to remember all the rest of his life.

"On another one he says: 'Will you forgive me, if you can—or is there no forgiveness for such as I?' and on another he says, 'I must have seemed like a brute to you. Oh, tell me I did n't—that you do care a little.' And on another sheet, way down in one corner, he 'd written 'Margery Gordon' twice and under it in smallest kind of writin' 'Margery Gordon Keith.' He 'd tore it almost straight through but I put it together again."

"Well I 'll be jiggered!" said Uncle Henry, slowly. It was the strongest language he permitted himself to use in Aunt Belinda's presence.

"Then, last night, while you was takin' your evenin' nap to get yourself rested so 's you could go to bed, that man that works for Martin Chandler come with a letter. I reckon 't was from her. And it took him more 'n half an hour to answer it. There 's another letter in the waste-basket, with no beginnin' to it, askin' to be excused unless she wanted to see him especially, on account of havin' worked hard all day and bein' more than common tired. And he did n't sleep

Upset about Something

none last night. He was walkin' and lightin' lights and blowin' 'em out again, and turnin' over in bed every other minute when he wa'n't walkin' and blowin' out lights.

"And this morning when I was out in the front yard, who should come by but Miss Bancroft's Ellen, all packed up for leavin'. I says, 'Are you leavin',' and she says she be, and I asked her what for, and she said she was tired of bein' a messenger boy, and that all day yesterday she was runnin' between Miss Bancroft's and Chandler's with letters."

"Whose letters?"

"Miss Cynthia's and Mr. Chandler's letters. She had to wait while they wrote to each other. Both Miss Cynthia and Mr. Chandler was dreadful upset about somethin' or other. And she said she 'd been sick all day."

"What was she runnin' around for if she was sick?" queried Uncle Henry, naturally confusing the pronouns.

"I don't mean she, I mean her,—Miss Judith."

"Maybe they 've fit," he said, with an air of pious resignation.

"Maybe they ain't. Miss Judith ain't the fightin' sort. And he ain't neither. All these four or five years that he 's been livin' here they 've got along as peaceful and quiet as a basket of kittens and if they 've fit, there 's not

Her Duty to Carter

only some good reason, but it 's her that 's done it." Sex-loyalty was one of Aunt Belinda's finer characteristics.

"And," she resumed, bristling, "if he 's gone and made that girl feel bad, and her bein' so nice and quiet and so kind to everybody—well, I 'm goin' to tell him what I think of him, that 's all."

"Maybe he ain't carin' what you think of him. I 've knowed folks what did n't care what anybody thought of 'em—leastways not enough to ask or to set quiet while they was bein' told. If I was you, Belinda, I would n't bother my head none about it. As long as he pays his board regular, I don't see that we 've got any concern with his morals."

"Henry Warner! That boy ain't got no mother."

"Well, neither have I."

"You don't need none. You 're old enough to have sense. And besides, if you ever want to know what ought to be did about anything you can always come and ask me."

"If I ain't told first," he remarked, dreamily, then, quickly recollecting himself, he asked: "Who 's Margery ?"

"I 've been telling you that ever since she come. I ain't seen her myself but some of the ladies at the Sewin' Circle have. They said she was an awful pretty little thing. Her pa

Aunt Belinda Decides to See Margery

sent her to stay at Chandler's for a spell. He 's dead."

"How can he send her if he 's dead ?"

"He sent her before he died," returned Aunt Belinda, with wifely patience.

"Was she here when he died ?"

"No, but when he was dyin' he told her to come here after he was dead, and he writ to Mr. Chandler and asked him if he would be a father to his little girl for a few months. The man that works for him found the letter and he told Miss Bancroft's Ellen, and Ellen told me. She was up there twice—once to supper. I ain't seen her myself, but I 'm layin' out to."

"When ?" he queried, without much interest.

"This afternoon. Soon 's I 've got your dinner and washed the dishes and got the kitchen cleared up and the things ready for supper, I am goin' to put on my best dress and go up there and call on her."

"Won't she think it 's funny ?"

"I dunno why she should. It 's manners for the old residents to call on the newcomers and there ain't one of the Sewin' Circle ladies been near her. Besides, I ain't been up to see Mr. Chandler for quite a spell. I 'm goin' to take him some fresh eggs. They don't keep chickens nor even a cow and Eliza told Ellen that once when she was breakin' one of the store eggs to

Determined to Find Out

make a custard that it exploded when she touched it and hit her in the eye."

"Must have been in the winter time," he commented, "when it 's hard to get fresh eggs."

"I dunno when 't was. Anyhow, there 's no reason why I should n't go up and see Mr. Chandler, and while I 'm there it 'll be natural for me to see this Margery, as they call her. Maybe I can find out from him what 's wrong and then I 'll know what to say to Mr. Keith if I see it 's my duty to talk to him as his own mother would if she was alive."

Uncle Henry moved restlessly in his chair. He disliked the idea of Carter's being "talked to." "I hope you won't see it as your duty, Mother. What ain't our business ain't our duty more 'n once in a blue moon."

"Never you mind, Father. I 'm goin' to find out what 's up before I 'm much older."

"Why don't you go and talk to her, then?"

"Which 'her'?"

"Miss Bancroft. If they was writin' letters all day yesterday—her an' Chandler—it 's likely she knows as much as he does, ain't it? Why n't you go there? Maybe you can talk to Miss Judith, too."

"Humph!" grunted Aunt Belinda. "Unless you 're a lot smarter 'n I be, you can't find out nothin' from a woman. Mr. Chandler 's the one I want to see."

Uncle Henry gave it up. He knew that

In Her Sunday Best

further argument would only make her "more sot in her way," as he termed it, to himself. He took the harness out of the barn and wheeled the buggy out into the yard. Instead of spending a hot afternoon peacefully in the cool, shaded parlour, he would be driving in the blistering sun—so much was certain.

Cold chills ran through him at the thought that he might be taken there also. Immediately he conceived numerous errands which would have to be done at the "store"—all plausible and admitting of no postponement.

But Aunt Belinda did not even suggest that he should do more than leave her at the gate. When she came out, in her best black silk and her "Sunday-go-to-meetin'" bonnet, with eight or ten fresh eggs in a small basket, she was too thoroughly alive to the importance of her errand to talk at all.

Deeply absorbed in her own thoughts, she did not speak until they reached the cross-roads, then she said, merely: "You can come back in an hour, Henry. If I ain't ready to go then, I 'll tell you when you can come back again."

Chandler's wheeled chair was on the porch. He nodded to Uncle Henry and called to him to know whether he were not coming in, too. Uncle Henry shouted a concise negative and drove away hastily.

"Henry 's busy," said Aunt Belinda, as she

The Call on Chandler

came up the few steps and offered Chandler a moist but friendly hand. "Farmers is terrible drove at this season of the year. I 've brought you some fresh eggs. Your Eliza was tellin' Miss Bancroft's Ellen that when she took up a store egg to make you a custard that it busted and hit her in the eye."

"I had n't heard about that," Chandler returned, repressing a smile, "but it 's mighty good of you. Would n't you like that other chair better? Try the rocker."

"No, thank you. I 'm comfortable where I be. I never was one to set much in rockin' chairs. I ain't had time. Most of my settin' has been done in straight-backed chairs and when I do have time to rest I don't often take a rocker.

"On account of Henry's havin' business in town, I thought I 'd come along and bring the eggs and set a spell with you. I ain't seen you for a long time."

"No," returned Chandler, absently. "You have n't."

"I heard you had company," she began.

"Company? Oh, yes—Margery."

"Relative?" queried Aunt Belinda, politely.

"No—the daughter of an old friend. The dearest, prettiest—she seems as though she might be my own daughter," he concluded abruptly.

"I 've wondered sometimes," returned Aunt

Going Away

Belinda, with the suspicion of a tremor in her voice, "what it would be like to have a daughter—or a son."

"To have a daughter would be like having Margery always—and to know that she'd never go away, except to be married."

"And havin' a son, I reckon, would be like havin' him around for ever just as he is, litterin' up everything and splashin' water all over the place. Only a son would be leavin' to get married, too—just as he's goin' to."

Unwonted lines of sadness settled around her mouth; the old eyes grew misty. She took off her spectacles and wiped them vigorously.

"Cheer up," said Chandler, kindly. "I'm sure you'll see him often."

"But not often enough. I don't now. He's always goin' away."

"And coming back, too, isn't he? Remember that he couldn't go away unless he had come back."

"That's so," mused Aunt Belinda. "I ain't never thought of that."

Chandler rang the bell that summoned his attendant. "Will you ask Miss Gordon to come down for a little while, please, if she feels like it?"

Margery appeared, presently, in white, with a string of blue beads around her throat, and her wonderful hair piled high upon her head

Margery's Self-Possession

in a big loose knot. She murmured the conventional: "Glad to meet you, Mrs. Warner."

"Most everybody calls me Aunt Belinda, and I ain't got a niece or nephew to my name. Henry says if I was aunt to everybody that calls me so, I 'd have to live in an ant-hill. But people call him Uncle Henry, too. I reckon 't was him that started it."

"Him?" queried Margery, with a smile.

"Yes—Mr. Keith. He lives with me."

"Oh," said Margery. "Does he?"

"Ain't he told you where he lives? I thought you knew him."

"I 've met him once or twice," returned Margery, "but I can't say I know him." She coloured faintly as she spoke, but her self-possession would have done credit to a woman twice her age. Chandler smiled at her approvingly.

"I 'll go and get my sewing if nobody minds," she said, rising. When the sound of her light feet died away upon the stairs, Aunt Belinda turned to Chandler.

"What 's she writin' to him for, if she does n't know him?"

"Who?" asked Chandler, startled for the moment.

"She," with an inclination of her head toward the door through which Margery had disappeared.

"When?"

"Last night. Your man come with a letter and it took him more 'n half an hour to answer it."

Nothing to Wonder About

"Oh," he returned, somewhat relieved. "That was my letter. I wrote to Carter myself—upon a matter of business," he added. Then, after an interval: "Why?"

"Nothin'," returned Aunt Belinda, somewhat confused. "I was just wonderin'."

"There 's nothing to wonder about," he assured her, trying not to be too abrupt.

"Is n't there, though?" she thought. For the moment she was tempted to tell him what she had found in the waste-basket, but wisely refrained.

Margery returned presently with her work. The remainder of the conversation was upon topics of general interest, such as the long period of unbroken heat, the possibility of rain in the near future, the low water in the river, and so on. Aunt Belinda was rather relieved when Uncle Henry appeared at the gate, fifteen minutes before the appointed time. His watch had stopped, and fearing that he would be late, he had erred in the right direction.

"Good-bye, Mr. Chandler. I 'll come again soon. Good-bye, Miss——"

"Gordon," supplied Margery, with cool politeness.

"Miss Gordon. I 'd like to have you come to see me sometime, if you want to."

Not Much Satisfaction

"Thank you, I will."

The words were irreproachable and the accompanying smile was dazzling, but nevertheless, Margery had managed to convey the impression of great distance.

"Well," said Henry, as they turned at the cross-roads, "did you find out what you wanted to know?"

"I ain't found out nothin'," remarked Aunt Belinda, tartly. "Do you suppose I go around among my neighbours to gossip? I ain't that kind of a woman, I 'd have you know."

"Oh," said Uncle Henry. "I thought you was goin' to find out somethin'. I disremember what it was."

Aunt Belinda grunted an unintelligible answer. With the tactlessness possible only to husbands, he went on heedlessly:

"You was goin' to find out somethin' from Chandler—about him. Don't you recall it?"

"Oh, that?" With apparent effort she searched the depths of her memory for a bit of unimportant fact with which, for some reason best known to himself, Uncle Henry desired to become acquainted.

"He wrote the letter himself—on a business matter. She did n't write to him at all."

"How did you find out?"

"He told me of his own accord. Men is easy to get things out of—they 'll tell all they know if you find 'em in the right mood."

All Not Right

"Humph!" said Uncle Henry.

"But that Margery," continued Aunt Belinda, with evident feeling, "I tell you, she's a slick one!"

"Pretty?"

"My, yes—and *that* polite! Regular city manners. I'm worried about him, someway, but I dunno why."

"You ain't got no call to worry, Belinda. Just set easy and let things take their natural course. That's the way I do."

"Yes," she answered ironically, "that's the way you do and no mistake. I never saw anybody set quite so easy."

She went on volubly until she noticed that Uncle Henry was almost asleep. When Carter came home, smiling and pleasant, as was his wont, she was vaguely reassured, yet, in her heart, she knew, through her sure feminine instinct, that all was not right with him who, in her inmost thoughts, she termed "her boy."

XVI

A Challenge

Starting Off

CARTER attired himself for the inevitable with solemn care. It was relief of a minor sort, but still relief, that the car had been repaired and he would not be obliged to walk along the road where he had spent the greater part of an unhappy night in shamed questioning of himself.

In spite of his legal training, he was too young and too thoroughly healthy in mind and body to be much given to self-analysis. He had brought red roses for Judith and white roses for Miss Cynthia, and was whistling to himself, though half-heartedly, when he started off.

Accusing conscience bade him linger on the road; impulse urged him to take a longer route and pass Chandler's house, where he might possibly have a fleeting glimpse of Margery, but, with his mouth resolutely set, he turned toward Miss Bancroft's.

The two women were upon the upper balcony. Occupied with the car, he did not see Miss Cynthia bend over to get her crutch, nor

The Awkward First Moment

did he hear Judith's low-voiced plea: "No —no! Please stay! Just as long as you possibly can!"

The old lady's presence was a relief to Carter also. He spoke to her, then bent over to kiss Judith as was his wont, not noting, in the confusion of the moment, that she turned her cheek.

"How are you, dear?" he asked, trying to keep his voice even. "Better?"

"Quite myself again, thank you," she murmured, hiding her face in the roses. "How exquisite these are! I must put them in water. Shall I take yours, too, Aunt Cynthia?"

Carter drew a long breath as Judith disappeared in the dusk of the unlighted room. The awkward first moment was over and the path lay straight ahead, difficult though it might prove to be.

"Was Judith really ill?" he asked, unable to think of anything else to say.

"She was," returned Miss Cynthia, concisely. "Why?"

"It is n't like her to have headaches."

"No? I think we all do things sometimes that are n't like us, don't you? Did you never do anything yourself that was conspicuously out of character?"

The random shot told, and even in the twilight, Miss Cynthia saw the colour surge into his face. "Yes," he returned, "I have."

What's Wrong?

"Then don't blame Judith." Sex-loyalty, the distinguishing mark of a woman who is really fine, was rampant in Miss Cynthia.

"I 've missed you," Carter said, when Judith came back. "Night before last I walked all over the map, and even after that, for some reason, I could n't sleep. So, last night, after a hard day in town, I was done up."

"That was n't like you," commented Miss Cynthia, with malicious intent.

"No," the young man agreed, moodily.

"Quite out of character," the old lady went on.

"Quite," Carter assented, politely.

Beneath the meaningless words, Judith detected warlike possibilities. When the ensuing silence threatened to become awkward she relieved it with a laugh.

"We 're all in the dumps to-night," she said. "What 's wrong with us?"

"It 's the waning moon," Miss Cynthia responded. "If it affects lunatics, when it 's at the full, why should n't sane people notice changes in it too?" She sat up in her chair, very straight. "I hate dying things," she said, passionately—"twilight, waning moons, autumn, old age, roses that drop their petals—everything. Why do they have to do it?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Carter.

"It is death that is the guide of our life," quoted Judith, "and our life has no goal but

Ghosts

death. Our death is the mould into which our life flows—it is death that——"

"Oh, for goodness sake," cried Carter, "cut that out! I feel as though I were making an evening call in a cemetery!" He rose and paced back and forth nervously. "I 'll smoke, if you don't mind. I would n't be surprised to have the ghost of Hamlet's father appear before me at any minute."

"Hamlet's father's ghost would be surprised," Miss Cynthia remarked. "It 's a long jump from the stage to the deck of a stranded ocean liner in a garden that 's dying for rain—I beg your pardon, Carter—I did n't mean to say 'dying.' I intended to say that we needed rain and to ask what you thought of the prospects for it. And, speaking of ghosts, why should n't there be at least one ghost in a little hamlet like Edgerton ?"

Carter laughed a little, but only to be polite. "You remind me of the two road companies that happened to strike a small town at the same time, with an *Uncle Tom's Cabin* show. The one that got the business advertised two Uncle Toms, three little Evas, and had Eliza cross the ice until the audience hissed her."

Miss Cynthia dropped into a reminiscent mood. Her usual high spirits had sunk to their lowest ebb; she suffered from the melancholy reaction. Last night's dreams still haunted her, as they had all day—not the

Overwhelming Gloom

inconsequent sort, usually ridiculous and to be dispersed with a smile, but the pitiful ones in which the dead come back, with outstretched hands and pleading eyes, to forgive—or to be forgiven.

Symbols of mourning persisted in her thought—long unlighted paths, weeping-willows, white gates with cypresses on either side, and wreaths of laurel tied with purple ribbon. The gloom of the garden was not the peaceful dusk, at the close of a hot day; it was menacing, overwhelming. Everything conveyed to Miss Cynthia the sense of foreboding—of impending disaster.

"Our cow is very sick," Carter was saying. "Aunt Belinda said at supper that if she should die, we would be obliged to get our butter from the crematory."

With a rush Miss Cynthia's normal gaiety came back. "Dear child," she said to Carter in the midst of her laughter, "you make me very sad. How your thoughts do run upon ghosts, crematories, and the like! You 're a most depressing person. Can't you think of something pleasant?"

"Only of you," he returned, gallantly. "What could be more pleasant?"

"Nothing," she said, with child-like candour, "when I am in the mood."

Not quite at ease, Judith slipped into the sitting-room, lighted the tall candles upon the

In the Candle-light

mantel-shelf, and drew her harp close to the open window. She was self-conscious to her finger tips. Primitive Woman within her urged her to go to Carter, tell him what she had seen, and ask for an explanation. Modern Woman, thinly veneered upon the essential femininity of her nature, bade her be quiet, watching if she chose, but to wait. She reflected, as she struck the first chord, that the greater part of life was spent in waiting, anyway, and that those who have learned to wait patiently are those who have learned to live.

Her face was in the shadow as she played, but, from where he sat, Carter could see the delicate outline of her profile and the full rounded throat, rising regally from the band of black velvet around the low neck of her scarlet gown. Having felt the need of colour, she fairly blazed with it. She seldom wore jewels, but to-night, aside from her ruby ring, she wore diamonds and emeralds upon both hands, an antique bracelet, an Oriental necklace, and a wide band of brilliants in her dark hair.

She had no rouge, but she had put a bit of false crimson upon her cheeks and lips with nail-paste, then angrily washed it off, despising herself for the subterfuge.

The candlelight wooed dancing gleams of fire from the band of brilliants. Above the mantel-shelf, the glass eyes of the moth-eaten stag's head stared straight into the darkness—

The Harp's Voice

a pitiful mockery of the fleet incarnation of the forest that once, stepping so softly that even the leaves beneath his feet did not rustle, waited, with dreamy eyes, at the border of the stream, for the low, sweet call of his mate.

Fitfully, too, a gleam of old silver came from the cabinet in the far corner of the room. From a table in front of the bookcase, half in shadow and half in flickering light, Carter's red roses, in a brass jar, breathed fragrance into the room. Somewhere, outside, a cricket chirped shrilly, unmindful of the harp.

The full deep chords trembled out into the night, thrilling like the soul of the woman who woke them from their silence, with passion and with pain. The harp's voice was hers, now, crying out in desperate appeal for the things which belonged to her by divine right.

Miss Cynthia stirred restlessly in her chair. What possessed Judith to play like that? Had the woman no shame, to lay bare her heart for all the world to see? Then she reflected, sagely, that Carter, being a man, was protected by his own stupidity from ever knowing much about any woman that she did not tell him herself. This wild music was to her as intimate a revelation of Judith as her white face and pitiful eyes had been the day before. A single glance at Carter assured her that the music carried no deep meaning, if, indeed, he heard it at all.

The Essential Missing

Outwardly calm and collected, Carter took subconscious note of the details of the room with that precise observation one accords to trifles in moments of stress. One of the tinkling prisms that hung from the chandelier was broken, three of the books in the book-case were pushed too far in, out of line, a vacant space in the red-bound edition of Stevenson indicated what Miss Cynthia was reading at present. The trellis at the end of the veranda, where the wild grape vine climbed up from below, was loose, and the next high wind would be likely to blow it down.

Yet, consciously, Judith dominated him as she dominated the room. Never had she been more beautiful, more perfect than to-night. Still, the essential thing between them was lacking; the bubble had burst. He was the same man—Judith the same woman, and, in two days, he had gone back to the point he started from—liking, admiration, sympathy, and understanding, but not love.

Blue eyes came before him, to trouble and to beckon, sweet lips answered to his as the lips of only one woman may ever answer any man. With a pang, he crushed it down, in defiant loyalty to Judith. What if she knew—what if she had already guessed? Could it have been that which made her ill?

"It 'll come back," he said to himself, miserably. "It's got to come back—that's all!"

A Sudden Inspiration

The music ceased. The last rippling chord died away in an echo that was at once a question and a call. Subtly the moment demanded from Carter something he had not in his power to give.

"Dear," he said—and his voice was very gentle—"that's lovely, but the harp isn't what you might call a joyous instrument. Will you come out in the car?"

"Oh—no," answered Judith, hoping, yet fearing to be alone with him.

"Go," urged Miss Cynthia. "You haven't been out of the yard for two days. It will do you good."

"Come," said Carter, rising.

A pile of music upon a low stool beside her gave her a sudden inspiration. Why not? Her eyes flashed for a moment and her colour rose, then she faded and softened again into her accustomed calm.

"I'll get my coat," she said. "It will be cool if we go fast."

"Take mine, dear," pleaded Miss Cynthia. "Please wear my white coat."

So Judith came out, presently, in Miss Cynthia's long white opera coat, heavy with lace and silver, the white fur of the lining lying caressingly upon her bare neck and arms. "I don't know whether I can stand the warmth of it or not," she smiled, "but the luxury of it bids me endure anything for its own sake."

She took a sheet of music from the stool, rolled it up, snapped a rubber band around it, and bent to kiss Miss Cynthia.

"Good-bye, dear. I won't be gone long."

"Lovely night," said Carter, as he assisted her to her usual place beside him.

"Yes," returned Judith, in cool, even tones. "Is n't it!"

"Where do you want to go?" he asked, as they started.

"To Mr. Chandler's, please. I have some music for him."

Carter moved nervously in his seat. "Why take it to-night? Could n't he wait for it?"

"Why not take it to-night?" asked Judith, unemotionally.

There was no answer to that, though in Carter's mind there were many reasons. "I don't care about making calls," he said, moodily.

"No? Perhaps as Uncle Henry says, you 're not a visitin' man."

"No—I 'm not."

"We won't stop but a moment and I won't even ask you to take it in. I want to speak to Mr. Chandler myself, anyway."

Nothing more was said. When the car stopped at the gate, Judith got out, trailing Miss Cynthia's splendour heedlessly in the dust.

Chandler and Margery were both on the

Throwing Down the Gauntlet

porch. "Am I not the grand lady?" asked Judith, playfully. "It 's Aunt Cynthia's coat. She made me wear it. It 's suffocating me, but it 's so splendid I cannot bear to take it off."

"You 're magnificent," Chandler said. "I 'm ever so much obliged for this."

"It 's beautiful," murmured Margery.

"Come out with us for a little while, won't you, Margery? We 'd love to have you."

"Thank you, no," the girl replied, hesitating.

"Go, dear," said Chandler, in Miss Cynthia's words to Judith. "It will do you good."

"Hurry," continued Judith. "I promised Carter not to keep him waiting."

So Margery went up-stairs after her own coat, and the white hat with the cerise bow upon it, over which she tied the pink veil. Judith wore no hat—most likely, Margery thought, on account of the wonderful band of brilliants she had in her hair.

"Margery 's coming with us for a little while," Judith said, coolly, as they opened the gate. "She 'll sit by you and observe the wonderful workings of the machinery, while I sit back here alone in my glory, and commune with the stars."

Before anybody could say anything, the arrangement was made. Subtly, Judith had thrown down the gauntlet to Margery, challenging her, as it were, to take from her even

The Truth at Last

the merest fragment of what was rightfully hers.

Now and then, as the car spun along, Judith leaned forward with some light comment, or with a question which required no answer. After the days and nights of pain she had come out at last upon her rightful path; she had regained her poise, never to lose it again.

What was hers, rightly, she would not only have but she would keep. Chandler had said that to her many times. What was not hers she surely did not want. She desired no man's love merely because there were no other women; she wanted it in spite of them. The truth had come to her suddenly, as it often does, after long groping through devious ways.

Carter had not spoken to Margery at all, beyond the conventional, "Good-evening. How are you?" and Margery had said nothing to him, except: "Very well, thank you. How are you?" Now he said, in a tone so low that Judith did not hear: "Did you get my note?"

Margery's hand instinctively crept underneath his arm. "Yes," she whispered. "Oh, how could you?"

"How could I what?" demanded Carter, through his clenched teeth. The touch had set the blood to racing through his body.

"Write to me like that. It made me cry."

The temptation to take her into his arms

temporarily unmanned him. He ran the car furiously through the deep dust and took a turn so sharply that Margery screamed a little.

Judith leaned forward. "Don't be frightened, Margery," she said kindly. "Nothing is going to happen to us that is n't meant to happen. You must cultivate poise." Then she quoted:

> "Serene I fold my hands and wait,
> Nor care for wind, or tide, or sea;
> I rave no more 'gainst Time or Fate,
> For lo! my own shall come to me."

Carter turned back from the wheel. "Suppose it comes too late?" he said, hoarsely. He spoke to Judith, but the words were for Margery—and both women knew it.

"The things that come too late," answered Judith, steadily, "are the things that were never meant for us to have."

She leaned back among the cushions, with a dull pain throbbing at her heart. Some iron hand seemed to clutch at it mercilessly, tearing at the tender fibre. The half light of the waning moon, that was sinking below the hills, shone mockingly upon the silver of Miss Cynthia's coat. Had she been clothed in rags, Judith could not have been more acutely miserable.

Nobody spoke again. Margery's mere presence had plunged Carter into a whirl-

Going Fishing

wind of painful emotion, mingled with a strange new-born ecstasy that made him bite his lips and keep his eyes steadfastly upon the road ahead.

The car stopped at Chandler's gate. Margery got out, unassisted. "Thank you so much," she said, including both in the remark. "It has been lovely. I 've enjoyed it."

Judith had slipped out, too. As was natural, she took the vacant place beside Carter. "Good-night," she called to Margery, with a friendly wave of the hand. "We 'll come for you again very soon." Carter said something under his breath, but Judith did not heed it. When they were half-way home, he broke the silence.

"I meant to tell you something when I first came to-night," he said, "and I 'd forgotten it. I 'm going fishing to-morrow, with a crowd of fellows—up in the North Woods."

"Yes," said Judith, politely. "I 'm sure you 'll have a good time. How long shall you be away ?"

"I don't know. Perhaps a few days, perhaps a month. It depends upon the fishing. Then, too, I 'll be lonely, for I 'll have no way of writing—or of getting letters."

"That will be a relief, in a way."

"Yes—in a way," he muttered.

The car stopped at Miss Cynthia's gate.

Good-Night and Good-Bye

"I won't come in," Carter said. "It's getting late."

"Yes," Judith agreed, "it's very late."

She had slipped out of the car and gone around it. "Good-night," she said, as she came up beside him, "and good-bye."

"Good-night," he repeated, lifting her face to his, "and good-bye." Then he kissed her—but his lips were cold.

XVII

Farewells

A Rainy Morning

THE rain Miss Cynthia had wished for was descending in torrents. Judith woke, from troubled slumber, to a wet and dreary world. Every tree and shrub was dripping and pools of water lay upon the grass. It was not a merry downpour such as comes in April, with the promise of sunshine even in its greyness, but a dull, dead rain.

In the grey swirl of it, the carrier pigeon, wet-winged and weary, alighted upon Judith's window-sill. With eager, trembling fingers, she took the message from him:

"JUDITH, DEAR:

"I 'm afraid my farewell last night was rather abrupt. Please pardon me—I have had so much to think of lately. I shall miss you constantly, and think of you all the time.

"Yours always, C."

Between the lines, with aching heart, she read an effort to be absolutely sincere—to say nothing that was not true, and yet to be kind. She answered, in his own manner:

"My Dear:

"I did not notice any abruptness. I know, of course, that you have much upon your mind. I shall miss you also, and think of you often, always with the hope that you are having a good time. 'Thine own wish wish I thee in every place!' J."

When the pigeon flew away, the window closed of its own accord—gently, but with finality. Judith sighed as she began to dress. So many doors that are wont to open at our approach some day swing shut instead—so many keys, once ours to command, fail all at once to fit the locks for which they were made!

She had not determined what she must do—save to bear this sharp, sickening pain that stabbed unceasingly at her heart. Repeatedly she told herself that she was foolish. Suppose Carter had kissed Margery—what of it? That, in itself, was nothing—only the circumstances made it wrong. She knew there were a hundred kinds of kisses, of which ninety-nine meant nothing, but this—she shuddered at the memory of it, for Carter had never kissed her as in the deadly instant of revelation she saw him kiss Margery.

In vain she reasoned with herself. Through sure feminine instinct she had felt, rather than seen, the constraint between them the night before. Like an avenging goddess she had

Judith's Love

held herself aloof. "Lead us not into temptation" was no part of Judith's daily prayer, rather was it: "Make us strong enough to face temptation without even a thought of yielding."

Accustomed as she had been to the admiration of men, Judith had not, as many women do, frittered away any part of that treasure which was herself. She had kept her lips sacredly for the man to whom they should eventually belong; refusing to be blinded with tinsel, she had waited for the gold.

Most women love love, rather than the man who gives it. Judith had loved Carter, and, in torture, loved him now. Not with the passionate self-seeking of the women who receive all and give little or nothing in return, but with the royal self-abasement of women who give all, asking only for the right to give, and are rewarded with little aside from a tolerant, half-amused acceptance.

She had not stooped to play the game that the woman who holds her lover must play whether she will or no. Frank, free, and full-hearted, meeting him with a certain proud equality, she gave as he asked. She had not affected astonishment when he told her he loved her, for she had known, almost before he knew it himself, nor had she asked for time in which to decide. She had gone to him at once, straightforwardly, her eyes shining with

Judith's Armory

a great joy, in that exalted state "where there is no need of proposing and love goes to meet love with open arms."

Judith's armory was destitute of the usual feminine weapons. She scorned the small concealments, the numberless coquetries, the thousand arts and evasions of the wiser ones. Mystery and astonishment were not for her to deal with; she had caused no wonder for Carter, except the first ecstatic amazement in which he found her his. To make him doubt her, to stir his jealousy, to make him wait until the inmost soul of him was sick with longing for even the touch of her hand—all these were beneath her. She had not yet learned that woman loses by giving, wins by withholding, and must hide her burning need of love if she would have it hers in fullest measure.

In other days, Judith would have gone to the train with him, heedless of the downpour, if he had not stubbornly refused to let her go. Once, in the dead of winter, when he was obliged to take a train that left at half-past six in the morning, he had risen at an unearthly hour, tramped through the snow to Miss Cynthia's, and had breakfast served to him by Judith herself, under candlelight, in a desolate dining-room long before anyone else in the house was astir. Breakfast at half-past five, in the winter, is seldom a cheerful affair, but they had made holiday of it, and their indis-

creet laughter had roused Miss Cynthia to wonder for a moment if Judith was never coming to bed, before she turned over for her last nap.

As it happened, Carter was thinking of it, too, with remorseful tenderness gnawing at his heart. His fishing-trip was a hastily-conceived escape from a tormenting situation. More than Margery or even Judith, he needed to get away into that blessed solitude where adjustments are made and perspectives gradually appear in the all-encompassing fog.

He saw the right way plainly before him, but it did not allure—indeed, the right way seldom does, for it is not often the easiest. "I 'll go away and get myself pulled together a bit," he thought, "then I 'll march straight ahead, as any decent man would. I've got to," he added sternly to himself.

Clad simply in his shirt and trousers, he leaned over the narrow stairway at six o'clock and called: "Aunt Belinda!"

"Merciful goodness!" she cried, running into the hall as fast as her old feet would carry her. "Are you sick?" Usually it required prolonged effort to induce Carter to rise at seven.

"No—come up here, will you please?"

"What is it?" she queried, breathlessly. "What 's wrong?"

Getting Ready

"Nothing, only I 'm going away, and I 've got to hurry. Get my suit-case, will you ?"

"Where is it ?"

"How should I know?" he returned, good-humouredly. He began to shave before the chiffonier, by the aid of the lamp with a reflector behind it, to the unfailing terror, as always, of the feminine witness. Uncle Henry's full beard, trimmed at regular harvesting intervals, was a hirsute monument, as it were, to Aunt Belinda's fear of razors.

"Mr. Keith," she said, timidly, "won't you cut yourself ?"

"I won't if you don't make me laugh, or disturb me in any other way. I 'm going fishing and I 'll have to ask you to pack my things. When you 've found one suit-case, get the other. I 'll need two. Take the new one for civilised clothes and the old one for uncivilised."

"What 's that ? What do you mean ?" Flushed and excited, she emerged from the depths of the closet, with a dusty suit-case in either hand.

"Never mind. We 'll pack the uncivilised one first. That 's the most important. Civilisation is only a veneer laid thinly upon primeval instincts. Four suits of underwear first, two heavy and two light—that 's it; two flannel shirts, my sweater, those brown corduroy trousers, my hunting boots——"

Packing

"How 're you going to get those boots in?"

"They 've got to go in—consequently they do. Could anything be more simple? Pajamas—no, not the silk ones,—half a dozen pairs of socks, three or four negligee shirts, my cigar case, my mackintosh——"

"Mr. Keith, you 'll have to take a trunk."

"Trunk! What for?" He turned to survey Aunt Belinda with simple masculine curiosity. "I won't be gone more than a month at the outside. What do I need of a trunk?

"Put in that book on dogs, and the one on pigeons, all the clean handkerchiefs I 've got, three or four shirts—I 'll pick out my own collars and ties—here 's my belt and slippers—and the cold cream for sunburn, and my smoked glasses. Now, as I dress, I 'll throw things to you as I use 'em and you can put 'em in—I don't care where you put 'em just so you get 'em in."

A fusillade of brushes and other toilet articles assailed Aunt Belinda, who bent over the two overflowing suit-cases upon the bed. A tube of tooth-paste, aimed with less precision, struck her on the forehead, but such small things do not matter when a man is packing.

"Ask Uncle Henry to get my fishing tackle together, will you?"

"I can't—he 's asleep."

"Wake him up, then."

The Sweet Face

"He ain't to be woke up in such time as there is between now and the eight-seventeen. Leastways not by me."

"Then you get it. I 'll take a look around and see if there 's anything else I want."

Hurriedly he opened one drawer after another, leaving them open, quite naturally, and casting an occasional small article at Aunt Belinda with his free hand. Having thoroughly ransacked his closet and chiffonier, he went to his desk, took out the packet of Judith's letters and the framed photograph of her, taken soon after their engagement. Judith had one of him upon her desk, also. Only those two prints had been made—the plates having been destroyed at once.

The room looked as if a young whirlwind had passed through it, in eager obedience to the dictates of Absolute Mind concentrated upon a single object, but Carter stood calmly in the midst of the confusion with the picture in his hand. Aunt Belinda asked twice if there was anything else she could do for him, but he did not hear, so she went out, unnoticed, and down into the kitchen to prepare a hasty breakfast.

Out from the frame of beaten copper, the sweet face, done in sepia, looked up at Carter with the merest suggestion of a smile. The dreamy eyes were alight with love—for he had been standing by the man who took the pic-

ture. With a pang at his heart, he remembered how she had stood there looking at him, and not at the camera. She had done her hair simply, so that it might never go out of fashion, and, for the same reason, had caught a chiffon scarf around her bare shoulders, fastening it in front with a rose that he had given her.

The rose had died long ago—its petals must have crumbled into the dust from which, by a heavenly miracle, they had sprung. But the light in Judith's eyes—had that died too? Less than a week ago, he had seen it there, but in seven days, or even an hour, a world may be made—or lost.

The few letters were all that she had ever written to him. With a lover's foreknowledge he had preserved even her first formal note, asking him to come to dinner. The next, less conventional in tone, thanked him for flowers —and asked him to come to Sunday night tea. Two more were long friendly letters, full of the charm of her personality, written to him during a week's absence of her own.

The next was Judith's first love letter, though Carter did not know it. The day following their engagement she had written to him, from a full heart, and shyly, as Mrs. Browning took to her lover-husband the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, had slipped it into his pocket that evening and asked him not to read it until he was alone.

Judith's Influence

Much later, in his room, Carter had read it, over and over again. It was less a letter than a revelation of the woman's inmost soul. Laying bare her deepest longings, her secret aspirations, her lifelong hunger, and her impassioned prayers, Judith had opened the door of her sanctuary and bade him enter in. And reverently, as one who falters upon the threshold of a holy place, Carter had understood, crushing the letter to his lips in an ecstasy of devotion that had lifted him at once to the heights.

Clean as he was, it shamed him that he had not been cleaner; fine as he knew himself to be, he longed to be finer still. Every righteous impulse in his nature had asserted itself, then merged into an overwhelming flood of loyalty and love. When he had faltered, Judith had sustained him. When he had failed, she had given him fresh courage, bidding him take heart again. Her serene eyes saw him always, not as the man he was, but as the man he might be; star-like, her love had led him on, eagerly striving to make the best of himself.

In the evening, when he left her, it was always in an uplifted mood. Purged of its thousand annoyances, the day had left him at peace, and eager for the morrow. Knowing that life is a struggle and that the best of us would not have it otherwise, Judith sent him

out to meet his fellows, already flushed with the victory he was to win for her.

Steadily she had filled his soul with purpose and with aspiration. When choice of two ways lay before him, she had asked him only to find the right way, and had taken the rest for granted. Nor had he failed her until something infinitely stronger than himself had taken him by the throat and made him crush Margery to him in that passionate embrace.

Carter swallowed the lump that rose in his throat. He put Judith's letters into one pocket and her picture into another. "It 'll come back," he said to himself, savagely, as he closed the desk with a bang. "It 's got to come back!"

He bolted the breakfast Aunt Belinda had prepared for him, at a rate that made her anxious, accustomed though she was to his method of absorbing his morning nourishment. Once she had asked him, hesitatingly, what he supposed his teeth were given to him for, and Carter had returned, on his way toward the chair where he had left his hat, that they were intended to make him look pretty and attractive when he smiled.

"Now then—two suit-cases, overcoat, fishing rod, and box of tackle—I guess that 's all. Get my cap, will you ? I can stuff it into this pocket. Yes, that 's it, thanks. Good-bye, Aunt Belinda. Say good-bye to Uncle Henry

What 's Up?

for me, will you? I 'll have to run if I catch that eight-seventeen."

He stooped to kiss her wrinkled cheek in filial fashion and was out of the house before she could reply. With a long breath of relief, she dropped into a rocking chair and wiped her face upon her apron. "Land sakes!" she said to herself. "If that boy ain't the beatenest! I dunno after all as I 'm so sorry he ain't mine."

Uncle Henry came out of the bedroom, rubbing his eyes. He was fully dressed, even to the coat and collar upon which his mate firmly insisted. "Folks as is able to sit up," she had always said, "is able to be dressed. And folks as can't dress themselves ought to stay in bed and have their meals brought to 'em. A man what 's too weak to put on a collar is a terrible sick man and orter have the doctor."

The air was still stirred by departure. Uncle Henry was not even mildly psychic, but his senses vibrated to the unusual. "What 's up?" he demanded. "What 's happened?"

"He 's went," Aunt Belinda returned, wiping her face again. "He was took sudden to go away."

"Where 's he gone?"

"I dunno. I reckon he don't know himself. He said he was goin' fishin'."

"Wonder if he 'll catch anything." Uncle

A Wandering Fit

Henry drew his chair up to the disordered table and reached for the coffee-pot.

"I 'll warm that up for you, Henry. Fishin' ain't catchin'—it 's just settin' in a boat and holdin' the pole and hopin'."

"I know," the old man said meditatively, "but he might catch somethin'."

"A cold most likely, or mosquito bites, and a raw neck from sunburn. I ain't never knowed him to get anything else."

"What did he go for?"

"Just took with a wanderin' fit. Men has 'em."

"Unless they 're married. Married men ain't allowed to do no wanderin'."

"Ain't they? Seems to me that they do a pile of it. You was down to the store yesterday, expectin' to be back in an hour, and you was gone all the afternoon. I had to feed the chickens myself."

Uncle Henry affected not to hear. He devoted himself to his breakfast and tactfully praised the cooking. "I ain't never seen your beat at an omelet, Belinda. And these fried potatoes! My!"

"I reckon he 'll come back with his neck sore," she resumed, clearing her throat, "like he did one time before. Do you remember how I was settin' up half the night with him puttin' fresh cream on it? We did n't have no butter that week, and hardly none for the

Uncle Henry Chooses

coffee. I told him he ought to save some for his coffee and he said he 'd rather have the cream on the outside of his neck when it was sore than inside. My, how he did peel!"

"When 's he comin' back?"

"I dunno. He said he 'd let us know. He 'll send me one of them souverine post-cards from somewhere, I suppose, tellin' me when he 's comin' and what he wants for supper."

Uncle Henry's gentle old face brightened at the talismanic word. "What are you layin' out to have for supper, Mother?"

"I ain't thought about it yet. You can have anything you like, now he 's gone."

"Liver and onions," he mused, "with brown gravy, and plenty of boiled potatoes, and hot biscuits and honey, and mebbe a few strips of bacon and——"

The remainder of the sentence died away in the rattle of a stove lid and the scraping of the frying-pan. "That 'll be about all, Henry, unless you want to be sick. I hope he 'll have a good time. If he ain't missed the train, he 's started to have it by now."

Carter had made his train by a margin so narrow as to be uncomfortable, the cinders from the departing engine having fallen upon his outspread coat-tails as he ascended to the rear platform of the last coach in one supreme effort. He was not, however, having the

Carter's Letter

"good time" Aunt Belinda unselfishly wished him to have.

He dismissed his stenographer for an unexpected holiday, after dictating the form of the letter which was to be sent in answer to all mail, looked up a time-table, sent a boy for a ticket, postponed a few important engagements by telephone, and locked the office door on the inside.

In his earnest effort to be fair to Judith, he had forgotten that he owed Margery at least the truth. She had told him that his note made her cry—Chandler had told him so, too, but in the stress of the hour, he had forgotten it.

Now, on his own letter-head, he wrote to Margery:

"DEAR—MY DEAR:

"You and I must never see each other again, for I cannot bear it. There are some things a man cannot endure, even at the price of his self-respect. If I should see you again, anywhere and under any circumstances, I should take you into my arms and tell you that I loved you better than everything else on earth —more than any man has ever yet loved any woman.

"In the note I sent you the other day, I said I was sorry that I kissed you—but I lied. I 'm not sorry, nor shall I ever be, for

To Margery

that one dear moment is the sweetest thing life has ever brought me, and, beyond it, I ask for nothing more.

"You will think, perhaps, that I have no right to say this to you, but why not, as long as it is the truth and for the last time? You know all that she is, and how fine she is; you know, too, that she must not be hurt, that every spark of manhood I have in me urges me to keep faith with her, and never let her suspect for an instant that I have changed.

"No, that is n't right—for I have n't changed. The feeling I had is exactly the same, except as it is overshadowed by this.

"I 've tormented myself a thousand times by wondering whether you care, too, but that I must not ask, for I have no right to know. I hope—that is, the better part of me hopes—that you do not.

"You must not answer this. I am going away until I get absolute control of myself, and this madness—if it is madness—is forgotten. That is what we must do—forget.

"If I have done wrong to write this, I humbly ask your pardon—and hers, too. I owe her my best and always shall.

"Good-bye, Margery, darling—oh, my dear little love, good-bye! May God bless you!

"C."

When he dropped it into the letter-chute, it

No Relief

was with the feeling that, with his own hands, he had buried something very sweet and precious while it was still alive. He had thought that to tell Margery the whole truth would be a relief to him, but it was not. Instead, he spent a wakeful miserable night, and many of the following nights, in wondering whether Margery cared.

XVIII

The Ashes of Desire

A Gloomy Day

AT the fourth day of cloud and mist, broken only by intermittent showers, Miss Cynthia's drooping spirits took a final plunge into the depths of melancholy. Subtly but certainly Judith's wretchedness had reacted upon her, though the younger woman consistently endeavoured to be cheerful.

"Don't try so hard to be pleasant, Judith," said Miss Cynthia, fretfully. "You annoy me. Why not be miserable?"

"All right," Judith returned gloomily, "if you prefer it."

"I don't, but I 'm not going to strain myself trying to be unnatural."

"You said the garden needed rain," Judith went on. She was standing at the window of the upstairs sitting-room, looking out into the sodden dreariness. Every morning the carrier pigeon came to her window—without a message. Finding herself unable to bear it, she had begun seriously to consider moving to a back room on the other side of the house.

"Rain, yes, but not a cloudburst. I sup-

Every-thing But—

pose you 're not going to swim up to Chandler's to-day ?"

"No—he 'll hardly expect me—that is, they won't be surprised if I don't come."

The old lady's keen ears caught the change of tone and the effort that lay behind the words. "Worse than I thought," she said to herself. "What can he have been doing ?"

Pensively, Judith stood at the window. The life was gone from her face, the youth from her figure. Within a week she had grown old, since joy and youth are one and the same. Frankly despondent herself, Miss Cynthia unselfishly determined to rescue Judith.

"Why despair ?" she asked lightly. "You have everything."

Judith turned suddenly. "Yes," she flashed back, bitterly, "everything but the one supreme thing I want."

In other days Miss Cynthia would have said teasingly: "But he's coming back, dear—he is n't lost." Now she sighed and made no answer.

Unutterable loneliness and heart-hunger brought tears to Judith's eyes. Fearing that she had betrayed herself, she added, brokenly: "I want my mother."

"How true it is that we never grow up," Miss Cynthia went on, after a pause. "Age does n't go by the calendar at all. Sometimes I 'm sixty, and then, within an hour or

Outgrown Emotions

so, I 'm six again, and wanting to play with dolls. I have them all somewhere yet, put away with my other outgrown emotions."

Pitifully Judith's eyes sought Miss Cynthia's face. "Do we outgrow our emotions?" she asked, pleadingly. "How long does it take?"

"Of course—why not? We cast aside thoughts and feelings that have served their purpose, just as the tiny creatures of the sea cast off their shells. When things hurt us, we 're merely on our way to another spiritual environment."

Judith's lips moved, but she did not speak.

"I 've often thought that it must hurt the little beast to get out of his shell," Miss Cynthia resumed. Without seeming to, she was watching Judith closely. "Sometimes they die when they 're only half-way out, as I suppose we do. Anyway we 're continually making new surroundings for ourselves, outgrowing them, and, with the inevitable accompaniment of pain, going on to the next. Birth and death are only relative terms—we 're for ever dying and for ever being born again. If the elements of our bodies are subject to daily—even hourly—renewal, why not our minds and souls?"

"You talk like Mr. Chandler," commented Judith.

Miss Cynthia bowed. "I don't know just how you mean that, but I choose to accept

In a Greek Mood

it as a compliment, that being the more pleasant interpretation. Is it still raining?"

"Yes."

Miss Cynthia tinkled her silver bell sharply, and in a moment had the entire establishment buzzing with life. It was not cold, but she ordered fire to be made in the big fireplace that yawned cavernously at the end of the room. A rumbling and scraping overhead jarred bits of plaster from the ceiling. Judith turned away from the window.

"Might I ask——"

"Fire, merely," returned Miss Cynthia with a pretty shrug of her shoulders. "And trunks. I 'm in a Greek mood to-day."

"Greek?"

"Attic. The original apostles of high thinking. Get it?"

"Rather subtle," answered Judith, smothering a yawn, "but not altogether beyond me."

"Would you mind getting my hat and my opera coat?"

"What for?" she asked, without interest, as she returned with the desired articles.

"I want to wear 'em. I fain would have the emotions of travel with neither the discomfort nor the expense. Now, then. We 're on an ocean liner that, for some reason, has mercifully failed to go. Maybe we 're in quarantine, but, anyhow, we 're not sea-sick. It 's nasty outside and time hangs heavily upon our

Two Trunks

hands. I believe that 's the usual phrase. It is a good time to rearrange our baggage, both material and immaterial."

With the large, white, plumed hat perched jauntily upon her silvered hair, and the festive opera coat thrown over the back of her chair, Miss Cynthia commanded the larger of two trunks to be placed in front of her, and sent Judith after her bunch of keys. The dancing firelight brought gleams from the buckle of brilliants, hitherto dead and dull in the dampness and gloom.

"Draw the curtains, please, Judith, and light every lamp and candle in the room. Bring in the candles from my dresser and from yours. We 'll make a gay night out of a dark day yet."

Miss Cynthia tried one key after another before she chanced upon the right one. "Like everything else," she observed, "it 's a question of the proper approach. All things belong to the one who knows how to unlock 'em."

"You speak in parables, Wise Lady."

"Wise ladies usually do. Men also. This is the lady trunk. All sentimental relics associated with ladies are in here. The gentleman trunk must wait in the hall, according to the strict rules of propriety."

"This is the larger trunk," said Judith. Gradually she was forgetting her unhappy mood.

Things of the Past

"Naturally. A woman's trunk is always larger than a man's trunk, is n't it, unless the man happens to be travelling for a millinery house and the season runs to large hats?"

The rusty hinges creaked and the lid of the trunk slowly yielded to Miss Cynthia's vigorous push. A faint, musty fragrance, as of long-dead roses, filled the room. The old lady sneezed. "My word," she said, "how the past can annoy you, even though it 's innocent!

"I have n't looked these things over for years," she continued. "Every time I do it, I get rid of a few of them. By the time we get to the Little Door between the arc of our mortal life and the rest of the circle, there is n't much that we desire to have buried—or cremated—with us, as the case may be.

"Do you remember the poet's wife who had to be disturbed after she was peacefully settled in her grave because he had buried poems with her which he afterward wanted to publish? I never want anything buried with me that anybody else is likely to want."

"You 're cheerful, Aunt Cynthia."

"It 's a cheerful day and this is a merry occupation. My gracious, will you look at the moths? That means that this little white flannel coat of mine will have to be put into the fire. My mother embroidered it before

Where Does it Go to?

I was born, and I wore it the first time I was taken out.

"Your mother wore it too. Being only two years younger than I, it descended to her through the natural law of gravitation. We were inseparable, until she fell in love with an Englishman and started out on the path of terror and of joy."

Miss Cynthia fell to dreaming, with the tiny garment in her lap contrasting oddly with her splendour. She was so pretty as she sat there, with candlelight and firelight glowing upon her, that Judith forbore to break the spell. She suggested the scene in the first act of *Becky Sharp*, where that clever young woman, upon spying the dancing costume and her open trunk, brings tears from those who had previously condemned her.

"Judith!" she cried, suddenly, "where does it all go to?"

"Where does what go, dear?"

"All the love and the tenderness and everything else! Where are the dreams that went in with these tiny stitches; where has the lovelight gone from my mother's eyes? Here's this futile, meaningless coat, moth-eaten, but still able to fulfil its original purpose, and I, outgrown it these fifty years, almost, and you, who were not to be here for almost twenty-five years after this was made—where has the rest of it gone, Judith? Where is it?"

A Wedding-Gown

"That 's the riddle of eternity, Aunt Cynthia. The solution lies farther out upon the circle, past the Little Door that you spoke of some time ago."

Miss Cynthia wiped away the suspicion of a tear. "Here," she said sharply, "put this into the fire. I have n't outgrown the emotion, but it 's got moths in it.

"Oh!" She put her dimpled hand to her nose when Judith did as she had requested. "Will you open the windows, please? The violent death of that particular emotion, if I may so phrase it, is odorous. Does it smell to you like murder or suicide?"

"Being familiar with neither I can't say," Judith laughed. "No, it 's all right," she continued to an anxious maid who appeared in the doorway. "We 're merely burning some old things in the fireplace."

"This is your mother's wedding-gown," Miss Cynthia was saying. "I kept it, after she died, having none of my own. It belongs to you, really."

A sharp pang stabbed Judith to the heart. What of her own wedding-gown? "I 'll take it," she said, with trembling lips. "I 'll put it away with my own things." She slipped into the shelter of her room, opened the drawer which held only the carefully pressed length of embroidered linen, covered with tissue paper, and laid her dead mother's faded finery over

An Autograph Album

it. Pinned to the back of the bridal gown was a wonderful veil of lace, deepened to the colour of old ivory and with a bit of the wreath of artificial orange blossoms still clinging to it.

Tears fell upon it before Judith closed the drawer, catching her finger in the crack as she did so, and diverting her by real pain of another sort, though considerably less acute. When she went back, she had her finger in her mouth.

"Good idea," approved Miss Cynthia. "Sometimes I think there 'd be less trouble in the world if people kept a finger or two in their mouths all the time. Conversation is a real pleasure, but it does keep things stirred up.

"Here 's my autograph album." The startling blue and gold of the cover had faded to a neutral tint which did not assail the vision. "I 've looked all through it and discovered that I 've forgotten everybody who has written in it except the teacher, and I remember her most unpleasantly on account of a habit she had of keeping me after school to make personal remarks in regard to my conduct. Lay it on the fire, Judith, and this diploma, too—I don't know that I need to be reminded that I 've left school."

"Do any of us ever leave it?" Judith asked, as the sacrificial flames brightened the room.

"Yes, dear. After we leave school, post-

Not Much Left

graduate courses confront us. Having learned about the dead, we begin to study the living at close range. I 've often wondered why they did n't teach the art of life in the schools and leave history and the dead languages to the peace and quiet of our declining years.

"Put this school-bag on the funeral-pyre, dear, and this pin-cushion. Wonder who gave it to me? Here 's the pink gown I wore to my first dance. Put that in, too—the silk is in tatters and I shall never dance again. Ah me!"

She peered into the depths of the trunk, and brought out a few old books. "Put these in the bookcase, dear—I don't know why I 've had them here so long. There does n't seem to be much left but my own baby-clothes. Look, Judith. Can you imagine that I ever wore that?"

As she spoke she held up a tiny white garment, simply but exquisitely made, yellowed deeply by the passing years. Judith bit her lips and turned away. "Scarcely," she answered, in a voice that was almost inaudible.

"Fool that I am," thought Miss Cynthia, closing the trunk with a bang. "Will you ask them to take this out in the hall and bring in the gentleman trunk? Where 's the key to it? It 's this flat one, I guess—there!"

Letters, dance-programmes, a broken fan, and worn sheets of music seemed to comprise

Old Beaux

the contents of the "gentleman trunk." Miss Cynthia sorted out the dance programmes and requested Judith to burn them. She hesitated over a carved sandalwood box, filled with the dust of crumbled rose-leaves. "He died," she said softly. "I did n't care, but he did. I think I 'll keep this."

She picked up a photograph, old fashioned and faded, and studied it for a moment. Then an ironical smile hovered about the corners of her mouth. "Cremate him," she commanded, tossing it to Judith.

"Why?" The man's face was pleasant if not actually handsome. On the way to the fireplace, Judith noted the high fine forehead, the poetic, dreamy eyes, the straight nose, the full sensuous mouth, and the weak chin.

"I was engaged to him once, for a little while. I was engaged so many times it got to be rather a habit. He lied to me, and I was on the verge of asking him to promise not to lie to me any more. Perceiving the irony of it, I returned his ring, with a beautifully written copy of the ten commandments. I put 'Thou shalt not lie' in red ink, so he would understand. I think he did—I never heard from him again."

"You did n't expect to, did you?" queried Judith, repressing a smile with difficulty, but Miss Cynthia was in the trunk again, hat and all, and did not hear.

The Prize Idiot

Packet after packet of letters came out and struck the floor, some near the trunk and others far from it. Miss Cynthia's face was flushed when she emerged, with the last packet and a triumphant: "There—that 's every last letter!"

"You reminded me of an energetic gopher," Judith commented, "excavating a new burrow in a bank of old sentiment."

"Very pretty, my dear. Put these on the fire, will you ?"

"All of them ?"

"All of them. The prize idiot is the man or woman who keeps love letters, no matter who they 're from." She selected a bundle as she spoke. It was tied with faded pink ribbon and dated in Miss Cynthia's own handwriting. She had her relics as neatly labelled as a butterfly collector labels his specimens.

"This man is married and has six children. I sent him two large spoons as a wedding gift and his wife never acknowledged it. I suppose she thought it was too suggestive. This one is dead, but he was married twice first. This one is n't dead, nor married, but he 's in the penitentiary for forgery—writing is a bad habit, when it leads you too far. Don't know what became of this one, nor this one, nor this. Here 's two priceless epistles from a man who hated a pen as I hate a needle. I ought to have 'em framed, but it 's wiser to burn 'em up.

In the Flames

"I remember reading a story about some children in a small town who got into an old trunk one afternoon, found a packet of letters, and went around leaving one or two at each neighbour's door. They were 'playing postman' and they had a beautiful time, but things were never the same again in the village. Very few of the women spoke to each other afterward."

Judith sat by the fireplace, stirring the letters with a poker, for nothing burns quite so slowly as folded correspondence-paper to which age has given a peculiar power of defying the elements. Now and then a "my darling" or "my dearest" or "my own beloved" flickered for an instant in the flame before it disappeared.

"How could you treat me so?" one man had demanded, in violet ink that had faded to brown, and again in the same bold hand: "Where were you yesterday? I waited and waited, but you did not come."

"I am terribly lonely without you . . ." "I love you with all my heart . . ." "Everything that I am and all that I hope to be I owe to you . . ." "The time that separates us seems eternity . . ." "I love you as woman was never loved before . . ." "Dear and Always Dearer . . ." "Good-night my darling, may God keep you" . . . "I love you as a man may love but once . . ." "You are the

Gone up in Smoke

woman God made for me . . ." "Dear, I want you, need you, love you so . . ." "More than queen or goddess, you are woman—what else is there for man to say?"

In scattered and broken phrases, the language of love appeared before Judith. Dead passions warmed to life upon the coals that in another instant would reduce them to ashes. The letters crumbled into dust upon the hearth, and the spirit that had prompted them, freed from the bondage of the written page, ascended in grey-and-purple smoke to the heaven where it was born. One last "I love you," curled within a wisp of burned paper, went up with the grey-and-purple to the unknown.

"There, Aunt Cynthia—your past has been properly cremated by your loving niece." Judith spoke lightly, quite at her ease again. "I have n't meant to read your letters, but I could n't help seeing occasional lines as they burned. Do you remember that story of Addison's in *The Spectator*, where the people on an ice-bound ship found that they could not hear one another speak, and how, when the thaw came, bits of conversation melted into the wrong ears?"

Miss Cynthia did not answer. She sat staring at the fire, lonely and pathetic in spite of her opera coat and white plumed hat upon which the brilliants gleamed like so many

Day Again

diamonds. Upon her lap was spread a man's large silk handkerchief that had once been white, but soaked to its margin by a rusty stain that, with a shudder, Judith saw must have been blood. One hand hung limply from the arm of her chair and from it by a tarnished gold chain hung a locket of black enamel, bordered by discoloured pearls. Upon the enamel, in high relief, was a diamond cross.

"It 's all gone, Aunt Cynthia," said Judith, very gently. "There 's nothing left but ashes."

"The ashes of desire," muttered Miss Cynthia—"left from the fires of Life."

For a long time there was silence, then Judith went to the window. It was late in the afternoon and the sun was shining brightly. She drew back the curtains and let into the room a flood of golden light that mocked the candles and the fire.

"Come, dear—it 's day again! See?" She went around the room quickly, putting out the candles.

Miss Cynthia roused herself. Her face was pale but her wonderful eyes blazed as from some inward light. "Yes," she said, "it 's day again," then added, to herself, brokenly, "How long, O Lord, how long!"

She reached for her crutch and rose, stiffly, to her feet. She still had the locket and the stained handkerchief.

"What about the trunks?" asked Judith, as she blew out a candle.

"Upstairs again, or anywhere you like. It does n't matter." She held up the handkerchief and the locket to Judith. "I have nothing left but these—nothing left but these!"

Judith bent to blow out the last candle. When she raised her head again, Miss Cynthia had gone into her own room and slammed the door.

XIX

The Parting of the Ways

Not the Same

THE ADORABLE ONE, who had at her command gifts of chicken bones and cream, was crying, and Algernon was very sad. Being a young dog, he failed to understand how the writing on two sheets of paper could break one's heart. Yet, since the Adorable One, with trembling fingers, had hastily torn open an envelope which she received one morning when they went as usual to the postoffice, things had not been the same.

Were it not for Eliza, who daily took pity upon him, Algernon would have starved. Sometimes, too, Mr. Chandler would give him a bone at the table, though it was against the rules of the house for people and dogs to eat in the same place. Mr. Chandler was troubled too, just as Algernon was. Once the man had called him to his wheeled chair, and, with a soft pat on his head, had inquired: "What 's wrong, old boy? Do you know?"

Algernon did not know, so he only wagged his tail politely in acknowledgment of the caress

No play

and reciprocated with a friendly lick of the man's hand.

The Adorable One spent the rainy days alone in her room, and never once opened the door, though Algernon scratched and whined outside and loudly thumped the floor with his tail. To-day, for the first time, she had admitted him.

But, contrary to his expectations, there was no game to be played, or even the inconsequent chatter to which he was accustomed. Having opened the door to him, and as quickly closed it again, the Adorable One went back to her couch, where she had been lying, and sat down upon a heap of rumpled pillows. Algernon went to her, and leaned hard against her, as a dog will lean upon those he loves. He put his head into her lap, turned his big brown eyes to the brimming blue ones, and wagged his tail.

The Adorable One put her arms around his shaggy neck and hugged him so tightly that it hurt. All she said was: "Oh, doggie! doggie! doggie!"

The door swung ajar, but nobody paid any attention to it. Finding it difficult to breathe, Algernon slipped out of her embrace, but very gently, so that he might not hurt her feelings. The sun was shining brightly, but, apparently, she did not care to go out. He nosed around in the closet until he found the old slipper

No Comfort

which she had taught him to fetch and carry, but she was not interested in it. She merely said: "Take it back," so he did so, then sat down to wait developments.

The roads were muddy, but the sidewalks were dry and the grass was soft and cool. It was a day divinely appointed for people and dogs to be out, but the Adorable One, usually so quick of comprehension, failed to understand this. He went back to the closet and brought the little whip which she usually carried when they went out, though she had never struck him with it but once or twice. Even to this, she said merely: "Take it back," and continued to sit there, with her face hidden in her hands.

Her loosened hair fell about her like a veil of golden mist. Sunbeams came into the room and touched it caressingly, then retreated before the glory they themselves had made. Even the little blue sailor at the cross-roads had a glimpse of it, as he spun around upon the weather-vane, and, now and then, had a chance to peer into Margery's room.

A halting figure in white paused at the cross-roads. The little blue sailor turned on his perch, but his painted smile brought no response from the sad face beneath the poppy-trimmed hat. As one whose steps are guided by duty rather than pleasure, Judith turned

the corner and went to the house. Chandler greeted her warmly.

"It 's good to see you again," he said, pressing her hand gratefully. "I 've missed you so!"

"I was sorry," she answered, removing her hat and, with swift, careless touches, restoring her hair to perfect order. "I 'd have come if I 'd been able to swim this distance."

"I did n't expect you—indeed, I hoped you would n't come. But it 's been lonely here."

Judith glanced at him quickly. "Margery ——?"

"Has n't seemed like herself lately, for some reason."

"Is she ill?"

"No—merely unhappy."

Judith bit her lips upon the instinctive question. "I don't know," Chandler returned, in answer to her thought, "but if it were anything I could set straight for her, I think she 'd tell me."

"I 'm sorry," Judith murmured. "Here 's a jar of sweet pickles from Aunt Cynthia, and the primer from which she learned to read. She said she expected you to keep the pickles but she 'd like to have the primer back."

"How did she happen to think of sending me the primer?" he asked, turning the worn and dog-eared pages with amusement.

"We were house-cleaning—that is Aunt

Cynthia was. She went over what she terms her 'soul-baggage' and rearranged it. She burned most of it, including all her old love letters."

"Wise woman," he said, half to himself.

"Why? Have you burned yours?"

"I never had any," muttered Chandler. "I wrote one, once, but there was nobody to send it to, so I tore it up."

"Aunt Cynthia says that anybody who keeps love letters is a prize idiot."

"Undoubtedly. You know Carlyle says: 'There is no other entirely fatal person.'"

"She wanted to send you some flowers, but there was n't a thing in the garden that has n't been drenched and had its petals soaked off. She was rather inclined toward a spray of poison-ivy that had turned scarlet weeks ahead of time, but I dissuaded her. She never can remember which is which."

"Well, which is?"

"A five-fingered leaf, like your own hand, means that the ivy is friendly, but a three-fingered leaf means: 'You 'd better let me alone.' She always gets it twisted."

While they were talking, Chandler had tuned his violin and replaced a broken string. Presently, the music of an old minuet danced up the stairway and through Margery's open door, but she did not seem to notice it. Algernon looked at her inquiringly, his head upon one

A Fluttering Sheet

side. Did n't the girl know they had company downstairs? Apparently not.

He whined restlessly, then dragged out the old slipper again. Nobody told him to take it back, so he lay down at the Adorable One's feet and chewed the small French heel almost off. Algernon had some new teeth coming and the slipper was acceptable, in a way, though it was not palatable to a dog that was accustomed to chicken and cream.

The minuet ceased. Voices murmured below, then the music began again. With full, joyous chords, a waltz came through the open door. Margery shuddered and hid her face more closely in her hands.

Sunlight streamed into the room. Little leaves, made from shadow, danced upon the floor in time with the waltz. The blue sailor spun merrily, and, in the rising wind, a sheet of paper fluttered off the couch and to the floor.

Margery did not move. Algernon nosed at it, vaguely delighted by an old familiar scent of man and tobacco, inextricably mingled with that subtle fragrance which was part of the Adorable One. Then, climbing up on her lap, he licked the small hands that covered her face.

"Go away!" she said, with a petulant slap.

He sat down for a moment, then picked up the sheet of paper and began to chew it. "Go

The Tell-Tale Paragraph

away!" Margery commanded. Grieved and disappointed, Algernon slunk through the open door and crept down-stairs, where the music was and where, also, people might be more cheerful.

"Judith," said the man in the wheeled chair, "would you mind seeing what that pup has in his mouth?"

The music stopped with a broken chord. A commanding figure bent over Algernon, who was chewing vigorously. Strong white hands forced his jaws apart and extracted a wet, crumpled sheet of paper.

Dizzily, in Carter's unmistakable writing, a single paragraph confronted Judith:

"You will think, perhaps, that I have no right to say this to you, but why not, as long as it is the truth, and for the last time? You know all that she is, and how fine she is; you know, too, that she must not be hurt, that every spark of manhood I have in me urges me to keep faith with her and never let her suspect for an instant that I have changed."

For the moment Judith's senses failed her, then, all at once, became mercilessly acute. "What is it?" Chandler was asking. "Anything important?"

"No," returned Judith, with lips that scarcely moved. Then she tossed it into the waste-basket. "I could n't see what it was, he 'd chewed it so."

"Algernon evidently believes with Macaulay that 'a page digested is better than a book hurriedly read.'"

Unsuspected Irony

"Evidently." Judith's stiff lips forced themselves into the semblance of a smile. "'On with the dance,'" she said bravely, "'let joy be unconfined.'"

It would be an hour before she could possibly escape. Mechanically, she played the accompaniments that Chandler suggested, though more than once her hands faltered upon the keys. Like a wounded animal, she longed for darkness and solitude; like a wounded animal, too, the trap still held her fast.

With unsuspected irony, Chandler's mood ran to dance music. All the afternoon they played waltzes, minuets, stirring marches, and old-fashioned country dances. The utter discordance of it all affected Judith very much as a cotillion might if it were given in a cemetery.

At last the clock struck five. With a sigh of relief she turned away from the piano. "Is it really five o'clock?" she asked, with well-assumed surprise. "I had no idea—I must be going."

When, after an interval which seemed much longer than it was, she had creditably achieved departure, Margery came down-stairs. She received in silence the polite message Judith

The Torn Page Recovered

had left for her, and Chandler, putting his violin into its case, waited for her to speak.

"I 've lost a letter," Margery said, "that is, part of one. It troubles me."

Chandler pointed to the waste-basket. "I think you 'll find it there. The puppy came in chewing a piece of paper and I asked Judith to take it away from him."

Margery rushed to the waste-basket with the colour surging over her face in a crimson flood. She found the torn page and smoothed it out. Then from a tense silence, the question fairly leaped at Chandler: "Did she see this ?"

"No—she said it was so much torn that she could n't see what it was."

"Oh!" The page was torn, indeed, but that one condemning paragraph was intact—and Judith must know Carter's writing. Had she seen it—or had she lied ?

"I 'm glad I found it," said Margery, dully, turning to go up-stairs again. "It 's of no importance, but——"

"But one does n't like to have one's letters chewed up," Chandler concluded, kindly. "Algernon is a very bad dog. You must teach him better manners."

Before he had finished speaking, Margery was on the stairs. Chandler smiled a little. He knew that she did not intend to be rude; she simply had not heard. Secretly he was

Carter's Return

troubled, for afar, and beyond perception by any sense of his, the gods of Life and Joy waged bitter warfare against an overwhelming Fate.

Judith scarcely knew where she was going, but instinct led her along the usual path. Against the sunset the love-star gleamed in mockery. Judith had followed it—and, like a will-o'-the-wisp, it had led her into the quicksands. But, remorselessly insistent, the right way lay open before her, and, as she had told Carter many times, there was no possibility of a choice.

White to the lips and very weary, she reached home and went at once to her room, sending to Miss Cynthia the excuse of a headache, which did not deceive the old lady at all.

At the end of two weeks Carter came home, tanned, somewhat burned, and fully self-possessed, though far from happy. Upon his arrival at the office he telephoned to Judith, said he was well, had had a good time, and would see her that evening.

Though she seldom wore it, Judith arrayed herself in black. Then, rebelling at the suggestion of mourning, she adorned herself with every jewel she owned—except the ruby ring, which she wore now only in Miss Cynthia's presence. If, at dinner, the old lady noticed

A Little Apart

that the seal of betrothal was missing, she had too much tact to speak of it.

When Carter came, with roses for both women, there was no trace of constraint in his manner, yet Judith shuddered when he kissed her.

"What is it, dear?" he asked, affectionately. "Are you cold? Shall I get you a wrap of some sort? Would you rather go into the house than to stay out here?"

To all of which Judith responded "No," in a quiet voice which seemed unlike her own. With gay banter Miss Cynthia endeavoured to conduct the conversation between herself and Carter. Judith sat a little apart from them, speaking only in monosyllables or in brief conventional phrases when she spoke at all.

At last Miss Cynthia went in, saying that she was cold and preferred to read in her own room. When her door closed, Carter came over to Judith and bent to kiss her cheek.

"I 've been away a long time, dear," he said, "but I 'll never leave you again. I had to go this time, really, though I did n't want to."

Judith did not answer.

"How is the house getting on?" he continued.

"I—don't know."

"Have n't you been there lately?"

"No."

"It 's rained a good deal, has n't it?"

Carter Tries to Explain

"Yes."

"Rather wet up in the woods, too, but there surely must have been some pleasant days. Why did n't you go to look at the house?"

"I—I could n't."

"Have n't you been there at all since I went away?"

"No." Judith cleared her throat, then, with desperate courage, faced him for the thing she had to say. "I have n't been there since the day you met Margery Gordon there. I happened to come in the back way, and saw you holding her in your arms. I went out again immediately. I don't think either of you heard me."

"So," said Carter, half to himself. He got up, and paced back and forth upon the veranda, his hands in his pockets.

"Judith," he began, "I have n't any hope of making you understand me—you 're too perfect to understand, but I 'm going to try it. I did n't know—I never guessed that you were there. Something took me by the throat and made me do it. I can't tell you how I have hated myself for it—there are n't enough words in the language to give you a clear idea. I 'd have come to you at once and told you, only it was n't decent to—to——"

"To betray her," concluded Judith, for him.

A Straight Question

"Exactly. I had no desire to spare myself. If you can understand how a man might be overwhelmed by a momentary impulse, then——"

Judith rose, too. Her face was in shadow, but the moon, coming out from behind a cloud, shone full upon his—boyish and perplexed. The mother in Judith pitied him; the outraged womanhood in her urged her to let him feel her scorn.

"Carter," she said, "this is no time for lies. I want the truth. I 'd rather have any man's honest hatred than his pretended love. I 'm not so dense but what I can understand a momentary impulse, a week's madness even, or more. A kiss, in itself, means nothing. I 'm not the jealous sort, as you know—you might kiss a dozen women without my caring in the least, provided——"

"Provided what?" In his turn, he concluded a troublesome sentence for her, but she evaded it.

"Do you love Margery? The truth, please," she went on, after an instant's hesitation.

Carter sighed heavily, then, miserably, he met her scornful, accusing eyes. "Yes, but——"

Judith stopped him with a wave of her hand. "Never mind," she said clearly. "That 's all." She extended to him a white hand that trembled ever so little. The

late summer moonlight revealed the ruby ring.

He shrank back from her, swallowing hard. "Judith," he said hoarsely, "I won't. You 've got to hear me—I 've got to make you understand. You 're making me hate myself for the rest of my life—you 've got to give me a chance to be decent—to be right with myself."

"And with me?" The mocking question was followed by an hysterical laugh.

"And with you. You 've been everything in the world to me, Judith. All that I am and all that I ever shall be, I owe to you. I 've loved you, I 've adored you—I 've worshipped you, and, as God is my witness, I have not changed."

"No," she returned, softening a little, "I can understand that, but there 's something else. I have n't been enough."

"Don't," he groaned—"yes, go on, if you like. I deserve it all."

"Dear boy," she breathed, in pity, "you 've outgrown your need of me, and you 're ready for something else. I don't want anything that is not wholly mine. I never want to be anything to you that any other woman on earth can be."

"Don't be hard on me, Judith—it was only a moment's madness, a momentary impulse——"

"You 've been thinking of yourself all this

Judith's Point of View

time, Carter. It has n't occurred to you that I might not want to marry a man who was subject to those impulses, nor that it might make any difference in my love for you. Do you think a woman can continue to love a man after she has seen him, even through a momentary impulse, putting another woman in her place? Have you thought of that?"

"No," he answered wretchedly, "I had n't thought of that. Women—good women—forgive—they always forgive!"

"Surely, but the love is n't the same. How can it be?"

"Judith!" he cried. "Have you ceased to care? Tell me the truth!"

He had her hands in his, crushing them so tightly that her rings hurt. Tense, eager, he waited for the answer which was so slow in coming. "The truth," he muttered, hoarsely, "the truth!"

Judith lifted clear eyes to his. Gallantly she told her lie. "I 'm sorry—but I can't care. I can't go on. This is the end."

He dropped her hands and turned away, then came back. "I see," he said grimly. "I 've lost you."

"Don't be so tragical, please," she replied, trying to speak lightly. "We 've simply outgrown each other, that 's all. People do it—both before and after marriage." Then, in Chandler's words, she added, "Whatever is

Remoteness

mine, I shall have and shall keep. Nothing that is truly mine can ever be taken from me—and what is n't mine, I don't want."

He choked back the impassioned words that came to his lips. Upon the instant she had attained her quality of remoteness. Serene, untroubled by emotion of any sort, Judith was as far from him as a star.

"Good-night," she said. "I trust we shall be friends."

Carter did not answer. He went away blindly, his senses confused by an emotional fog. Judith kept her self-control until he had closed the gate behind him, then sank to the floor of the veranda in a passion of bitter tears. Stabbing sharply, like the surgeon's knife, yet with something of its healing power, was the knowledge that she had saved her pride.

XX

Cloth of Gold

Two Selves

RED and angry, as though following some great disaster, morning broke over the roofs of the world. Judith woke with the sense that something had happened, and in an instant was alive to her painful realities. The carrier pigeon came to her window with a message:

"I can't bear it. You must let me keep my self-respect—you must help me keep it. Surely you will not fail me now."

To which she replied:

"Have I ever failed you? Is it not rather you who have failed me? Believe me, I have done the best for you as well as for myself. Please do not speak of this again."

Like the stroke of a sword, her agony had cleft her in twain. She had become two selves—one a hurt and outraged woman, on fire with resentment and passionate longing; the other calm and poised like some subliminal self, watchful, and on guard to save them both.

The way lay straight ahead, and step by step,

Judith Tells Aunt Cynthia

she would go upon it—she must go. She thought of going away somewhere, then swiftly reproached herself for her cowardice.

"Face the thing, Judith," she admonished herself, "and never let your bugles sound retreat."

It required some courage to meet Aunt Cynthia's eyes when she went out upon the veranda to breakfast. Without obtrusively avoiding the subject of Carter's return, the old lady chattered inconsequently of everything else. When the trays were removed Judith settled back in her chair.

"Aunt Cynthia," she said abruptly, "I 've broken my engagement."

Taken off her guard, even Miss Cynthia was confused. For the moment she did not know what to say. Obviously, she could not offer congratulations, nor ask why, nor make light of it as a lover's quarrel. She picked up her crutch, went to Judith, and kissed her. "I may be selfish, dearest," she said softly, "but I 'm very glad I 'm not going to lose you just yet."

Judith caught her hand and pressed it to her cheek, then released it. "Thank you, dear Aunt Cynthia," she said tremulously, "I knew you would understand."

Beginning with the subject nearest at hand, Miss Cynthia spoke of the garden, and requested Judith's opinion as to the bulbs for

More Trouble

Fall planting. She went on to pickles, grape jelly, new curtains for the sitting-room, and other housewifely matters to which, as a rule, she paid but scant attention. She had never allowed herself, as she expressed it, to become "the slave of things." The house was for her—she was in no sense for the house.

Except for the pitiful reminder of the crutch, Miss Cynthia seemed to be in full bloom. Her cheeks were delicately pink, her lips were red, and the sun shining upon her silvered hair gave her the halo of a saint. Her wonderful eyes sparkled with animation and with the joy of living. Judith wondered what tragedy lay buried in Miss Cynthia's heart, and if, over the grave of her own, she might ever hope to have such a garden.

"A note, ma'am," said the maid, appearing on the veranda. "Mr. Chandler's man is waiting for the answer."

"Wonder what 's broken loose now," thought Miss Cynthia as she opened it.

"Dear Friend," the note began. "I am in genuine trouble. My little girl is very unhappy and is packing her trunk to leave me. I dare not ask, I cannot bear to have her so wretched, and, more than all the rest, I cannot let her go.

"She is absolutely alone in the world, she is too young to be commended to its tender

Acting on Impulse

mercies, and, when I asked her where she was going, she said, with a sob, that she did n't know.

"Tell me what to do, for I am in despair.

"M. C."

Miss Cynthia sighed, looked at Judith for a moment, then sadly shook her head. She thought of sending a note to Margery and asking her to come and see her, then realised that she knew the girl very little, never having seen her but two or three times. And, moreover, there was Judith to be considered.

"Something wrong?" Judith was asking, in her cool, deep voice. "Am I concerned in it in any way? Is it anything that I can straighten out?"

"I—don't know," answered Miss Cynthia, doubtfully. Then she tossed the note to Judith, acting upon one of those sudden impulses which are wise quite as often as they are foolish.

"Tell him there is n't any answer," said Judith, to the waiting maid, "but that I 'm coming."

"That 's an answer," observed Miss Cynthia, gratefully. "Into any place of doubt or trouble or unhappiness, there is never anything to send better than you."

"Thank you, dear." Judith bent to kiss her and with a murmured "good-bye" set forth

Miss Cynthia Relieves Her Mind

upon her errand. Miss Cynthia watched her until the last bit of her white linen gown had disappeared among the trees. Then, and then only, did she dare to commune with herself.

"Brute!" she mused, with her small hands clenched, "what can he have done to that blessed girl? If I were n't helpless, I 'd go to town this very morning and have it out with him. However,—there 's the telephone."

She was half-way to it when she stopped to think. If Judith had desired her to telephone to Carter while she was gone, she would have said so. And if Carter wished to communicate with her, he knew the number. She went back to her chair upon the veranda, shaking her head, and feeling herself singularly powerless.

She might write to Carter and tell him what she thought of him. Miss Cynthia knew that our opinion of other people is seldom interesting to them, but she got out her writing pad and with the keenest edge of her sarcasm inspiring a blunted pencil, put down in clear and concise English her exact estimate of a man who would willingly let Judith get away from him, even if she wanted to. She added such vituperation as a lady may properly employ, and, much relieved in her own mind,—tore it up.

Accustomed to self-analysis, she began to wonder whether part of her concern for Judith and Carter might not be merely personal curiosity. "Anyhow," she thought, "they 'd

credit me with that, if I meddled. They 're both strong, healthy people and I think they 're capable of managing their own affairs. And yet," she continued, with pardonable scorn, "what a hopeless mess they 've made for themselves! What are they going to do with that house and the furniture, and Judith's wedding-gown, and everything else?" Reflecting that the answer would probably disclose itself in due time without inquiry upon her part, she settled herself to wait, very much in the mood of one at the theatre, when the curtain has fallen upon a stirring climax.

When Judith reached Chandler's he was out upon the porch, watching for his man with Miss Cynthia's answer, but, as is the habit of messengers, the man had loitered upon the way and so it happened that Judith reached there first.

"Miss Cynthia—" he began, leaning forward to take her outstretched hand.

"I 'm the answer. Is n't it a heavenly morning?"

"It is if you 're happy. If you 're not, it is n't."

"Where is Margery?"

"Upstairs. Do you want to go up?"

"No—ask her to come down, will you?"

So Chandler called, twice: "Margery! Margery dear!"

Listlessly she came out, slow of foot, and

A Bit of News

her hair in wild disorder. The blue eyes were deep and sad, with dark hollows under them; the scarlet mouth drooped at the corners. "Did you want me?"

"I asked for you," said Judith, kindly. Margery had not appeared to notice her presence. "I was out for a walk, so I stopped in with my bit of news. I've broken my engagement, and I'm trying to tell everybody first, before they hear it from others. It may not be the most delicate way, but it's the most effective, don't you think so?"

Chandler was astonished, but had no time to say so. Before Judith, trying to make her trembling lips smile as she spoke, had even finished her sentence, Margery had rushed to her, crying: "Judith! I haven't had anything to do with it, have I? Oh, tell me I haven't!"

Judith was pale, but she forced herself to meet Margery's eyes. "Of course you haven't," she lied. "What on earth gave you such an idea as that? We merely discovered that we weren't suited to each other—that's all. It's rather unpleasant, in a way, but not nearly so unpleasant as it would have been if we had found it out after we were married. There's no occasion for hysterics—Carter and I are the very best of friends—and hope to be so always."

"Oh," breathed Margery. "Oh!" Sobbing, she left them, and went upstairs.

When her door closed, Judith turned to Chandler. She had herself well in hand now. "That 's the answer," she said briefly, inclining her head toward the open door. "I don't think she 'll go now."

The man's eyes sought hers. Judith tried to avoid that searching gaze, but could not. At last, with a sigh, she faced him, and leaned back against the pillar of the porch. "Well ?"

"Judith! What of you ?"

"What of me ?" she repeated. "I have everything. I 'm young and strong, I 've never been ill a day in my life, I 'm not so bad to look at, I have money enough to enable me to live as I choose, I have talent of which I may make something if I 'm willing to work, I have a comfortable home, the dearest Aunt who ever lived, and—the dearest friend." The slightest possible emphasis on the last words made it clear to Chandler that she meant him.

"But, Judith! What of you ?"

"What of me ?" she repeated, once more. "Why I have everything!"

"Everything," said Chandler, very slowly, "except—the—thing you want."

She caught her breath quickly. "Yes," she said, dully, her eyes cast down and her mouth trembling. "It 's the way of the world, is n't it ?"

"Yes," he sighed, "it 's the way of the world,

To Keep What is Ours

but I don't know that the fact that it 's customary makes it any easier to bear. Have you, out of some quixotic generosity, turned Carter over to Margery just because you thought one of them happened to be interested in the other ?"

"No," she returned, almost inaudibly, "I have n't done that." Her pitiful eyes sought his now. "I have n't given away anything that was mine. The things that are ours cannot be given away, or taken away, or lost. We break our hearts, all of us, trying to keep things that do not belong to us—and to which we have no right."

"I know," he answered. "To keep the thing that is ours—and not to lose sight of the dream——"

His thoughts were far away now, back in the dead years when Judith was only a little child. "It 's the dream that 's kept me here," he muttered. "Else why should I stay, when there are so many ways out ? There 's only one way to enter the world but there are a thousand ways to leave it, and a brave man, as well as a coward, may sometimes force the door."

"The dream ?" said Judith, idly. Submerged in her own pain, she scarcely knew what she was saying.

"Yes. Judith! Look!" He pointed to his tiny front yard, where nothing grew but cedars

What Makes the Difference

and a maple or two outside. With a comprehensive gesture, he swept the circle of their vision. "I could sit here, with a camera, and take a picture of all this. What would it be? The absolute truth, would n't it?"

Judith nodded.

"And again, a painter might sit here, with canvas and colours at sunset, perhaps, or in early morning, and without varying a line or hiding a defect, make a beautiful picture—is n't that so?"

"Surely."

"It 's the dream that makes the difference. You 've made a painting of Carter and now you 've come face to face with the photograph. The illusion is gone, is n't it?"

"Not quite," answered Judith. She was pale, but bravely tried to smile. "I think it 's going—I 'm praying for it to go."

He leaned forward and closed his hand over hers. "Don't pray for it to go—pray rather that you may keep it, even though it hurts. Keep your House of Life as God gives it to you, and hide the dark places with the tapestry of dreams. Do you understand?"

"Not altogether."

"Then listen. Memory will take for you out of the tangle every joy you 've ever had. She casts the rest aside. Try as you may, you cannot remember pain—only the fact that you had it. Is it not so? Thread by thread

Memory's Fabric

it is woven into the fabric of your mortal life, sombrely perhaps, but never wholly dark. As you look back, you can see how you have woven blindly, upon a design so large that you could not comprehend its purpose until it had slipped out of the loom. It may not be what you would have wished it to be, but it 's there—the pattern you were meant to weave, and with that, perforce, you must be content.

"No matter what the pattern is, nor how rough the thread, nor how the loom demands your endless labour because it 's in a dark place or because it 's difficult to move, if you have the dream in your heart, you achieve the cloth of gold, and so, even in the shadow, you have something which will catch the light, when there is any, and give it back to you. And——"

"And—?" repeated Judith.

"And I think, when all is done, the Master Weaver will lead us farther on—we who have been weavers of dreams and have made the most from what we have. If we 've put the golden thread into the fabric, and woven the pattern as it was given to us without questioning or repining, we shall not stop here—I 'm very sure of that."

"How do you know ?"

"Because. But that 's a woman's answer, not a man's. Judith! With the exception of one hour, all the happiness I 've ever had in my

life, I 've made for myself. I 've had to—if I were to have any at all."

Everything Was Changed

He hesitated, for the merest instant, then opened wide the secret door. "I never told you—I could n't tell anybody, but perhaps it may help you now. When I was twenty-five I left the little town I lived in and started to the city, yonder, to make my fortune, as many young men do. The train was wrecked and—this happened to me.

"It was a heavenly day, all gold and green and violets, with every bird singing its little heart out in ecstasy; clear, crystalline, and brilliant, as if God had just made the whole world and it was new.

"Without warning and in the space of a minute, everything was changed. There was a blinding crash, a blaze and a glare, the pungent smell of smoke, the cries of hundreds of people in torture, men running, with white faces, the stroke of an axe on fallen timbers, clouds of steam, more cries—I need n't tell you all the horrors.

"I had seen that a girl occupied the seat in front of me, but I had paid no attention to her. She and I were pinioned by wreckage, and cut by broken glass, but before the fire reached us, they dragged us out and laid us side by side upon the other side of a grassy embankment, where we could not see the horrors behind us and where, if we stuffed our

fingers in our ears, we could not hear very much.

"Naturally we got to talking, during the hour that elapsed before the relief train came and took the injured to the hospitals.

"I cannot remember a thing that we said. One of her little feet was badly hurt and I know I managed to drag myself closer to her and bandage it, after a fashion, with a big silk handkerchief I happened to have. I remember she wore white, and a white hat trimmed with roses, but the white hat was crushed and stained with blood from a cut somewhere under her heavy hair.

"Fool that I was, I never asked her name, nor she mine. We simply took each other for granted. She was the one woman who was meant for me since the beginning of time, and I was the man who was meant for her—and we both knew it, though neither of us said a word. We forgot how terribly we were hurt: we forgot everything but that.

"In the midst of the horror, we had come face to face with each other and nothing else mattered but that. It did not occur to me that we could ever be separated, we simply belonged and there was nothing more to be said. I knew at the first glance that she was neither married nor engaged for she wore no rings—in fact, no jewelry at all except a locket.

"She was mine, Judith," he said, bitterly, "and through my own absolute idiocy, I lost her. We were taken to different hospitals and never saw each other again. I spent every cent I had in advertising, I asked everybody I knew, I even sent a description of her to the police in different cities. I did not know the name of the town she came from, for she had been on the train since early in the morning, long before I started. I sent a man to every town upon that line of railroad, to see if she could be found. I had absolutely no clue except the fact that she was injured in that wreck. Even in the list of the injured at the newspaper offices, there was n't the name of a single unmarried woman, though at every place they said the list was not complete; that some were dead and unidentified.

"That 's all I 've had," he concluded—"that one perfect hour, with the woman God meant for me from the day He said 'Let there be light and there was light.' From that, I 've made my golden thread. Divinely, by the means of it, I 've achieved my cloth of gold. And some day, because I have done the very best I could while I was here, because I 've tried to sink myself in service for others whenever it was possible to do it—because I 've waited and trusted and tried not to rebel—some day, surely, God will bring us face to face again and give us to one another for al-

Have Faith

ways, though it may be in some other world than this. It 's right that it should be as it is, or it would n't be so."

"You have faith," she said, deeply moved.

"Yes. A weaver of dreams must have faith. Or else, when the dream fails, it would never come back. Some day I shall have her—or else see that this was all it was meant for us to have."

Judith hesitated, with a question upon her lips, then she felt that the door between them was closed. "Thank you," she said, gratefully, "for telling me. It has helped me. Good-bye."

She bent over his chair, kissed his cheek softly, and went away—choking back the tears.

XXI

Adjustments

How She Found Out

AS Judith had expected, Margery said no more about going away. She unpacked her trunks and sent them up to the attic quite as a matter of course. She made no confidences, nor did Chandler ask for any. Like Miss Cynthia, he did not care for the sort of confidence which is extracted by questions. In her eyes an interrogation mark so much resembled a corkscrew that the comparison was evident.

By observation and by a subtle use of the law of suggestion Miss Cynthia usually found out what she wanted to know without much difficulty. Judith came home from Chandler's, very quiet, and not inclined to conversation. She said, merely, that Margery would stay, and Miss Cynthia guessed that Judith had told them both of the broken engagement.

The carrier pigeon haunted Judith's window at sunrise until, in self-defence, she moved her possessions into a small back room. She burned the few letters she had received from Carter but returned none of his gifts except the

Rebellion and Pleading

ruby ring, which he promptly sent back to her with a note saying that he wished her to keep it, and asking if there was anything she had given him which she wanted him to return.

In answer, Judith asked for her letters, and, one night, long after Miss Cynthia was asleep, she held a private cremation in the fireplace. The following day she received a note from Carter saying that he had deeded the house to her, and that she might do whatever she chose with it.

Some correspondence ensued, rebellious upon Judith's side and pleading upon his. It was her house, he told her, planned by her and built for her, and of no conceivable use to him. He wanted very much to give it to her, and for the sake of all that they had been to one another, he asked the privilege. Boyishly enough, he asked her whether she were going to refuse him every slight opportunity to "get square" with himself.

Judith smiled a little at that, though ironically. It is so characteristically masculine to atone with material offerings for immaterial wrongs—or rather, to attempt it, to pay for tears with diamonds and for disappointments with roses or pearls!

She composed several notes before she achieved the brief line which she finally sent, to the effect that it was of no use to her, either, but that if it would make him any happier,

she would accept it for the time being, and make some final disposal of it later on.

Various plans occurred to her, ranging all the way from a summer home for convalescent women to a refuge for stray cats. With a subconscious idea of hardening herself, she arrayed herself one afternoon in the gown she had worn the day Carter asked her to marry him—and which she had put away sacredly that night,—slipped the ruby ring upon another finger, put on the silver chain with the abalone pearl pendant, and, with due announcement to Miss Cynthia, went over to look at the house.

Nobody but the workmen had been there since the fatal day, more than a month ago. She went in by way of the back door, winced a little when she entered the dining-room, and, with a wild pain at her heart, opened the door leading into the living-room, where, last time, she had seen—she shuddered even at the thought of it.

"There 's nothing there, Judith," she said to herself. "It 's all gone—quite gone. There 's nothing to be afraid of."

She forced herself to stand where Carter and Margery had stood, until the hurt had somewhat subsided. She went over to the inglenook, trembling from head to foot, and sat down to rest. Then, for the first time, she saw the cushion which Margery had made.

At first, she wondered where it could have

The Magic Gone

come from, then she remembered that at different times when she had been playing with Chandler, she had seen a bit of pale green linen in Margery's hands as she worked outside, upon the shaded veranda. The clover blossoms were like Margery, too. Margery had come over, probably, to put the cushion in the house and had happened to meet Carter. It had not been planned, then—it was purely accidental. There was a certain relief in the thought, even though the dice of chance had been thrown against her.

The atmosphere of the house was entirely different—the magic was gone. The exquisite emotion that glorified every rafter and gilded even the humblest commonplaces of construction had died with no hope of resurrection. The fireplace that had once been a household altar, where the finer flames of the spirit might mingle with the breath of transmuted pine, was only a fireplace, now—its secret charm had utterly vanished. The whole place had the emptiness of a mirror which has nothing to reflect. Desolation had come upon every nook and corner, as though the little house itself were mourning for its lost joy.

"Little sunset House of Hearts,
Standing all alone;
I could come and sweep the leaves
From your stepping stone—

Her Soul at Peace

. . . . . .

"I and he could light your fires,
Laughing at the rain,
But oh, it 's far to Happiness
A short way back again!"

Judith murmured the words to herself as she sat there, holding the cushion. There was a definite relationship existing between her and the house which had been built for her. There had been light and life and music in her heart, just as there was to be in the house, and he who had summoned both into being had gone away, leaving only echoes, and little memories that, like frightened children, tiptoed from place to place, dreading the sound of their own footfalls.

Merged into an unspeakable sadness, the sharp, stabbing pain of the preceding week was mercifully eased. Like a river, winding a tortuous way among sharp cliffs, reaching at last its ultimate sea, her soul had come to its peace. Memory would return at times, of course,—she knew that,—to torment her with visions of what might have been, but, none the less, she had outgrown her environment and was on her way to something altogether different.

What Chandler had said, the other day, came back to her clearly. She must weave according to the pattern laid upon her loom. Later, when she had worked out this single

Judith Sees Clearly

episode, and saw it in perspective, she could understand the design, but not now. She must go on, with the dream in her heart, and put golden threads into her fabric as she could.

"The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment." The words flashed upon her consciousness as though someone had spoken them aloud. Was that Chandler? No—Aunt Cynthia had read it aloud a few days ago, as she was turning the well-worn pages of her beloved Emerson in search of something else.

Judith walked home slowly, more nearly happy than she had been since the day the truth burst upon her with the vividness of a lightning flash. No longer inextricably a part of it, she could see clearly. She had seen Carter not as he was, but as he might be, according to the way of lovers. The reality, jarring upon her vision, had been her fault, not his.

From what Chandler had told her, she realised that when divinity approaches, the blinding glory of the god shines afar into the hearts of those to whom he comes, long before they may look upon his face. He had dwelt upon the sense of completion, upon the fact that they two had been meant for one another since the beginning of time—that nothing mattered but that. It was not outside of Judith's understanding, but it was beyond her experience. She and Carter had

come to love, along the pleasant ways of friendship, which, indeed, the god may sometimes travel, though more often he chooses unfrequented byways and secret passages, where strangers may meet, with something of his light reflected upon either face.

She imagined that Carter had recognised Margery almost as soon as Chandler had known that he was face to face with the one woman. How hard it must have been for Carter, trying to be loyal, so sternly bidding himself "be decent!" For the first time, she pitied him, and realised that what is hard for us is seldom altogether easy for the others; that no situation arising in our complex life can possibly involve one individual to the exclusion of everyone else.

When she reached home, she almost collided with Miss Cynthia, who, with crutch and cane, was taking a brief constitutional upon the gravelled paths in the garden.

"Have you found anything?" asked the old lady.

"Yes," smiled Judith. "My balance."

"Priceless possession," observed Miss Cynthia, dropping into a garden chair that was sorely in need of paint and a new rocker. "I always feel sorry for a meteor when I see it flaming through the heavens, presumably jerked out of its orbit by some superior force."

Eyes Open

"Carter gave me the house," said Judith, calmly.

"Yes? What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know. What would you do?"

"Sell it and give him the money—or endow a bed in a hospital with it."

"He would n't take the money."

"Perhaps not, but he might be glad to get the bed, some day when he was sick or very tired."

"Perhaps." Judith had not thought of that. "I don't know just what to do."

"Don't do anything, my dear, until you 're absolutely certain that you want to do it. The way opens before us when we 're meant to take it—I 've learned that, if nothing else, during my five and forty years."

Judith bent to put her cool cheek against Miss Cynthia's flushed face. "How have you learned so much, dear, shut away from the world for so long?"

"By keeping my eyes open," snapped Miss Cynthia, "and my mouth shut when I could."

Chandler was keeping his eyes open, also, but he saw nothing, save a listless and silent Margery, with dark circles under her eyes, tense and strung almost to the breaking point. Night after night during his own wakeful hours, he saw the light from her room streaming out upon the cedars and heard the wakeful

murmurs of the little birds asleep in the scented boughs, wondering if the day had come so soon.

Centre of the Tumult

She ate almost nothing and the roses were gone from her cheeks. She seemed to be waiting for something which did not come. Day by day, she watched the postoffice feverishly, but there was never a letter for her. Judith came on Monday and Thursday afternoons as usual, her beautiful serenity unbroken, her calmness and poise unshaken. Secretly Margery marvelled at her, and, at length, made up her mind that she could not have loved Carter at all.

Chandler wondered at Judith, too, but neither of them made any reference to the past. As a pebble, cast into the depths, may reach by means of ever-widening circles some distant, unseen shore, Judith was at peace again, the ripple having gone beyond her ken.

The centre of the tumult was Carter himself, restless, remorseful, and almost unable to work. Every day he told himself that he had done the best he could, that however deeply he might have been at fault, he had atoned every way that was within his power. His conscience was at rest, but he was far from happy. He missed Judith more keenly than he had ever thought possible; he hungered for the old, happy comradeship and even for Miss Cynthia's stimulating talk. At times he

Night after Night

thought of going up to see Judith, for she had assured him that they would be friends. Reason told him there was nothing against it, but instinct kept him away.

Night after night Judith was awakened by his car rushing past the house at top speed. Night after night, too, Margery stirred uneasily in her fitful sleep at the sound of a distant automobile, which never came so near as the cross-roads. Sometimes it stopped, far outside the circle of light made by Chandler's lantern, and, after a long time, turned and went back, along the river road.

Margery did not guess, but Judith knew. She knew, too, that he spent an occasional remorseful evening upon the steps of the House of Hearts. Such small things as the tracks of his car in the road and an occasional cigarette stub betrayed him.

Hoping yet fearing to see him, Margery never went out of the yard during the hours he might possibly be at home. Once, during the day, she had walked past Mrs. Warner's but had looked neither to the right nor the left. She was too miserable even to feel the pair of sharp eyes that took account of her passing, or to guess that she had stirred up a sharp resentment against herself that lasted well into the next day. Carter had told Aunt Belinda that his engagement was broken and immediately had started for his train, allowing

neither time for question or comment. Aunt Belinda had at once repeated the fact to Uncle Henry, and added, viciously, quite of her own accord: "It 's her that 's done it."

In his masculine innocence, Uncle Henry supposed that "her" meant Judith, as it had heretofore. He merely said "Jes so, Mother, jes so," and resumed his nap.

Feeling himself utterly helpless, Chandler watched Margery from day to day with anxious love. Having found, at last, that he did not intend to question her, she became more at ease with him and did not avoid him so much. Often she lingered downstairs long past her usual bedtime, talking indifferently or not at all.

One night she asked, pitifully, "Do we always get the things we want the most ?"

"Not always," the deep voice answered, "but we get the things that are meant for us to have."

"Then we should n't want what we don't get," she said, half to herself.

"No, but we do."

For some reason which he had never been able to define, Margery seemed very near to Chandler. Sometimes he was forced to remind himself very sternly that she was not his own flesh and blood, he yearned so unspeakably for the good-night kiss she never offered to give.

"Father used to say," sighed Margery,

Some Women

"that wanting was life and satisfaction was death. I don't know what he meant by it, do you?"

"If wanting is life, I know what that is—I'm very fully alive, if that's the test. He had the epigram habit, did n't he?"

"I don't know. I guess so." Margery's thoughts were far away again now. Presently she turned to him again.

"Can you remember your mother?"

"Yes. Can't you?"

"No. She died when I was born."

"That's so," Chandler answered, softly. "I 'd forgotten."

"Father did n't. I can remember how some women used to pet me and give me things and say what a dear child I was. I used to think it was the same as having lots of mothers, but they changed very quickly. One day, I 'd be the dearest child that ever lived, and the next, though I had n't done anything at all, all I 'd get would be: 'Run away child. I 'm busy.' I see now that they wanted to marry father."

Chandler laughed. "But you did n't know it then."

"No," said Margery, with her small hands tightly clenched. "I wish I had. I 'd have stirred things up."

"You 're vicious, dear. Your father did n't need you to protect him."

Margery's Mother

"No," answered the girl, softening a little. "I guess he did n't."

"I 've wished so often I could remember my mother," she went on, in a different tone. "Father used to talk to me about her sometimes, until I felt that I almost knew her, but I guess it is n't the same. He told me how lovely she was—he was always sorry, I think, that I looked like him instead of her. He said that whenever I saw a woman whom I admired, I must always remember that my own mother was lovelier; that if anybody was gentle and kind, mother was more kind and more gentle, that other people might be very charming but that mother was perfect. When I was bad he always said: 'Why Margery! The daughter of your mother doing a thing like that? I 'm surprised!' He used to tell me that I 'd make mother feel badly even up in Heaven if I was n't just what she wanted me to be. I used to say my prayers to mother, and father let me do it—he said mother was with God, though nobody knew where God was, and that He would listen to her, if not to me. Do you think it makes any difference whom you pray to?"

"No. I believe a real prayer always goes straight."

"I don't see why mother had to die," Margery continued, after a pause. "Father did n't, either. He said she was never ill a day in

A Wreck

her life, except the time she was hurt in the railroad accident."

"Railroad accident!" he echoed.

"Yes—did father never tell you?"

"No," said Chandler, his lips barely moving. Could it be possible that Margery had come to him as a sort of divine compensation—bone of the bone and flesh of the flesh of the woman he had loved and lost?

"It was a long time before they were married," Margery was saying. "She was coming to the city from some little town out in the country—I don't remember the name of it—and right in the middle of the afternoon there was a wreck, and mother was terribly cut by glass and her foot was broken, but she got well all right. There was n't even a scar, but she never could bear to go anywhere on a train afterward."

"Naturally not," Chandler answered. His lips were dry and stiff. "Margery, have you a picture of your mother?"

"Yes—of course. Did I never show it to you?"

"No—neither you nor your father. I 've —I 've often wondered," he stammered, "what she looked like."

"I 'll get it."

She went upstairs and, after what seemed an age, returned with a framed photograph. Chandler snatched it from her, his hands icy cold.

The Pictured Face

"I forgot you could n't see out here," Margery was saying. "I 'll get a candle."

The light flickered, died down, then shone brilliantly upon the pictured face—the grave sweet eyes, the tender mouth, the soft hair that curled low upon the forehead. He looked at it long and earnestly.

"Is n't she lovely?" Margery asked. "But not a bit like me."

"No," he said, in a tone new to Margery, "she is n't a bit like you. Nor like anybody else I 've ever seen."

He lay awake that night long after Margery slept, thinking. Of her, still existing somewhere, as herself, or as wind and grass and sea, he humbly sought forgiveness. It was of course impossible that she could have married. Having once seen the sun, as he had, she would never accept starlight; she would wait, as he waited, for dawn.

XXII

"From the Unvarying Star"

Waiting for Her Own

DIM and far, as from some distant army, came the first bugles of the frost. Golden rain fell from the willows and birches, and now and then, amid the green-gold splendours of a sunlit maple, a scarlet leaf appeared. Back in the woods, the Little People, in fur, were making ready for Winter, and the Little People, in feathers, had already begun their long night voyages upon cool seas of air, to some more friendly clime.

Margery was still waiting, more listless and more weary than ever, for that which did not come. During the cool evenings Chandler sat in the library, among his beloved books, but Margery preferred the veranda—perhaps because she wanted to be alone.

Subconsciously, she had absorbed something from Chandler's dominant faith. The things that were hers could never be taken from her or lost. She tried, honestly, not to want anything which was not hers.

She sat on the top step of the porch, leaning against the pillar, looking out into the

An Old Serenade

sombre shadows of the cedars and beyond them, to the cross-roads, where Chandler's light burned, moonlight nights and all. High above the circle of light thrown by the lantern upon the gravel, the little blue sailor stood at attention, waiting for a wind to which he might answer, but there was none.

The night was exquisitely still, save for the crickets that fiddled in the grass, unmindful of the fact that even fairy instruments must soon forget their merry tunes. The moon rose behind the cedars and flooded the earth with the clear, golden light of early Autumn, throwing sharp shadows against the house.

Chandler picked up his violin, and, upon muted strings, played to himself that old sweet serenade, beloved of lovers since the day it was written:

"All the stars keep watch in heaven
While I sing to thee
And the night for love was given—
Darling come to me,
Darling come to me."

"Oh," breathed Margery, in pain. Her small hands clenched themselves tightly, and she choked back a sob. Why, of all things, should the man play that?

And then, quite simply and inevitably, like most other miracles, Carter came, at the first moment when he felt that he could, and at

Warm Again

the same time "keep square" with himself. Margery heard the car when it turned at the river road, and knew that it must be his, for automobiles were not common in Edgerton. As it purred steadily toward her, it seemed that the loud beating of her heart must sound above the music within. When it stopped at the gate and Carter got out, she tried to go to the gate to meet him, but could not. She sank back upon the step, leaned heavily against the pillar—and waited.

The little hand she gave him was cold. "Aren't you chilly out here?" he asked. "Shan't I get you some sort of a wrap?"

"No," Margery stammered. "I—I 'm quite warm." And indeed she was, for long forgotten roses bloomed upon her cheeks again, and the young blood danced through her veins.

"Do you want to come out in the car?"

"No. I 'd rather stay here."

"So would I."

From within came the music of the serenade, crying out from the violin in passionate longing, thrilling from the desolation of the man's soul to the strings that gave it voice.

"How is he?" asked Carter, inclining his head toward the open door.

"All right. Just the same as he always is."

There was silence again, save for the sere-

nade. When it ceased, Carter leaned forward, out of the shadow.

"You know, don't you, Margery, that my engagement is broken?" The tone was very gentle, such as a man would use in speaking to a child.

"Yes."

"Did—do you know why?"

"Yes. She told me."

"Oh!" He was astonished, for that was not like Judith—not at all. Then he took second thought.

"What did she tell you?"

"Oh—nothing, except that you were n't suited to one another and found it out in time. She said lots of people who were n't suited to one another did n't find it out until after they were married, and she was glad it had happened now instead of later."

Carter nodded. That was more like Judith. "She 's right," he said, "she always is right about everything—perfectly, unmistakably, unfailingly right."

"I—I was—" Margery hesitated, then stopped.

"Yes? You were—? Please go on."

"I was afraid, at first—when she first told me, you know—that I might have had something to do with it, so I asked her."

"And she said——?"

"She said I had n't, but I could n't help

As plain as anything

feeling badly. That—that day—in the house—you know—I—I—thought I heard somebody come in at the back door, when——"

"Imagination, Margery. Nobody came in." For one of them at least, he said to himself, their first divine moment should be kept sacred.

"And—and then—the letter——"

"Yes," he said quickly, "the letter? What of that?"

"Algernon got one page of it and chewed it up, and she took it away from him. Mr. Chandler said she said she did n't see it, but when I got it out of the waste-basket where she put it, there was one paragraph left—as plain as anything."

"Which paragraph?"

"The one about her. Where you said how fine she was, and all that, and that she must n't be hurt, and that you must go on, and not let her know that you had changed."

Carter got up and started toward the gate, his hands in his pockets. Margery followed him—a little white ghost, slipping noiselessly through the shadow. She put a pleading hand upon his arm. "Don't," she said brokenly. "You 're—you 're not angry with me?"

He turned and caught her in his arms. "Angry with you? Oh, Margery, Margery, Margery!"

"Don't," she said again. She put her hands up to his shoulders and pushed him

An Instant of Rapture

back. "I don't want you to think I was careless with the letter, because I was n't. I was reading it—I read it every day and sometimes in the night. It was—all I had. And—I was crying, so I did n't see Algernon get it. Do—do you think she could have seen it?"

"No, of course not if she said she did n't." None the less Carter knew now why Judith had refused either to understand or to forgive. He appreciated, too, her shielding of Margery. Only a fine woman could have done that.

Yet it did not matter—nothing mattered any more, save that he held Margery in his arms. Unresisting now, she yielded him her lips. All the hunger of the years without her was as chaff in the divine fire that burned in his blood. It was one of those rapturous instants in which man realises that as truly as God is love, Heaven is immortality—with love.

"Darling, dearest, beloved—sweetheart," he murmured. "Do you care?" Crushed to his, her lips answered "Yes."

Chandler had begun the serenade again, but it sounded faint and far away. "Say you love me," Carter pleaded, holding her so close that she almost cried out with the delicious pain of it.

"I do."

"Do what, darling?"

"Love you."

Nothing but This

"How much?"

"Oh, I don't know—there are n't any words for it. There 's nothing — anywhere — but this."

"No, and there never has been, and never will be again. Listen, dear. The first time our eyes met I loved you, but I did n't know it, because I was blind. All my life I 've wanted you, and all my life I 've been trying to find you. Every step I 've taken has led me to you, through devious and winding ways. And then when you came, and I did know, I fought against it and struggled, but it was no use. There 's never any use of that, when a man comes face to face with the one woman.

"Back in the beginning of things, Margery, you were made for me to love, and I for you. I belong to you just as your hands and eyes do. You 're mine—mine—mine!"

There was a murmur of little dead leaves at their feet. The blue sailor turned, smiling, to look at those who stood so closely together in the shadow of the cedar, but quickly turned his back again, as became a gentleman of politeness and discretion. From within, like an undertone of the serenade, came emptiness and longing, crying out from the violin.

"Is it for always?" she asked, as he drew her closer still.

"For always, darling. For this life and the next and for all the lives to come—till death

and even beyond it, Margery—you 're mine—mine—mine!"

The music died away in a low, sweet chord. Afar, in the withered grass, the cricket paused to rest. Blown stars drifted across the measureless seas of space between the clouds and moon. As she had said, there was nothing anywhere but this. In the scented shadow of the cedar there was only the fragrance of the lips that clung to his, and the sound of his own heart, surging with the nameless rapture that comes but once.

Because the night was cool, Miss Cynthia had a fire, but there was no other light in her room. By contrast, the flood of Autumn moonlight that made the windows blue was chill and desolate, sending a shiver through Miss Cynthia that impelled her to draw her chair closer to the fire.

Her purple velvet gown was heavy with lace, and over her shoulder she had drawn the white Egyptian scarf, heavy with spangles. Being in the mood to shine, she had borrowed Judith's band of brilliants, to gleam amid the silvery masses of her hair. At her throat was the locket she had taken from the trunk the other day,—of black enamel, with a diamond cross in high relief, bordered by discoloured pearls.

Judith had never seen it before, until the day Miss Cynthia took it out of the trunk, with

Purple and Scarlet

the blood-stained handkerchief that had affected her so strangely. Something lay behind it all—so much was certain. There was a grave in Miss Cynthia's heart, too, as there was in her own.

The firelight brought Judith a certain warm sense of intimacy. It was a night for confidences, to be bestowed upon those who do not ask. Judith leaned forward and methodically stirred the fire. The flames leaped up, sending a glow to the stag's head over the mantel and an arrow of light to a bit of old silver in the cabinet at the other end of the room.

"Not so much light, my dear," warned Miss Cynthia. "We swear at one another, even in total darkness."

"Why did n't you tell me you were going to blossom out like a pansy, in purple velvet?" asked Judith, with a laugh. "I have plenty of other gowns—I need n't have worn scarlet."

"I wore this because it was warm, and I was cold."

"I chose this because it looked warm," Judith returned, "but you 're not deceiving me, dear. With your arms bare to the elbow and your neck and shoulders clothed simply in a scarf and a locket, you can't be unusually warm."

"Well?" challenged Miss Cynthia, with a mischievous light in her eyes.

"You put it on because you knew you 'd

be beautiful in it, but it seems a pity to waste a royal robe like that upon a mere woman. If Carter—" Judith paused to stir the fire again. "I suppose Carter will marry Margery, eventually."

In the glow of the fire Judith's lovely, serene face did not seem to change. She spoke in the tone one uses in speaking of the dead, who have been dearly loved.

Miss Cynthia's answer was irrelevant, yet in a way much to the point. "Some men require to be loved by a resourceful and knowledgeful woman—others by a squab."

"Is Margery a squab?" queried Judith, without much interest.

"I think so. Carter raises 'em, does n't he? The change is quite natural. He 'll be true to her—that is, I hope he will."

"What is it to be true? To continually fight yourself, and resist every temptation that comes your way?"

"Somebody said that temptations were made to be yielded to, but I don't go quite as far as that. Still, it is n't possible that everything you ever want to do is radically wrong."

"No," Judith agreed. "I suppose not."

"I wonder," Miss Cynthia resumed, after a little, "if any man was ever true to one woman—I mean so absolutely hers that he never thought of anybody else after he saw her."

One True Man

"Yes," said Judith, dreamily, "I know of one. Mr. Chandler."

"He's lame," commented Miss Cynthia, wickedly. "He can't go out."

"But this happened at the time he was made lame. I wonder—he didn't say I should n't tell anybody. It can't matter if I tell you."

"No," Miss Cynthia returned, moodily, "what people tell me does n't matter."

"He was on his way to the city," continued Judith, "to make his fortune. He was only twenty-five. In the seat in front of him was a girl in a white gown, with a white hat trimmed with pink roses. The train was wrecked and they two were caught by falling timbers, and taken out, terribly hurt, just before the fire reached that car. For an hour they lay on a grassy bank, out of sight and even out of hearing, if they put their fingers in their ears. They talked, and Mr. Chandler knew that she was the one woman—he said she knew it, too, though neither of them said anything. They did n't even ask each other's names—they just took each other for granted.

"When the relief train came, an hour later, they were taken to different hospitals, and after he was able to leave the hospital, Mr. Chandler spent every cent he had, trying to find her—advertising, detectives, and all that,

A Hurry Call

you know, and by the time his money was gone, he had to give it up.

"He 's loved her ever since," she continued, clearing her throat, "and dreamed about her, and wanted her all the time, the way a man wants the woman he loves. I 've been so sorry for him ever since he told me. If he could only have kissed her once, and had that to remember, why——"

"Judith!" Miss Cynthia had risen and was leaning against the mantel. Her face was deathly pale but her wonderful eyes were alight with secret fires. "Judith! I don't care whether you 're on speaking terms with Carter or not! Get him! Get his car! Get my hat—get my opera coat, and for the love of Heaven, hurry!"

"But, Aunt Cynthia!"

"Don't talk! Act! Get Carter! Get the car! Bring my things! Oh," she sobbed, sinking into her chair and hiding her face in her hands, "what a fool I 've been—what a blind, blind fool!"

In an instant the house was awake with confusion. Judith wrote two notes to Carter, sent one maid with one to Mrs. Warner's, and the other to Mr. Chandler's with the other. Unless he had stayed in town, he would be at one place or the other. Both were brief, and exactly alike. "Come at once with the car. Aunt Cynthia wants you. Hurry. J. S."

A Radiant Face

Carter and Margery were still standing in the shadow of the cedar when the breathless messenger arrived. "Wait a minute," said Carter to the weary and excited maid, "I 'll take you back." Then, to Margery: "Something is wrong, dear. You 'd better go in. I 'll come back just as soon as I can. Anyway, I 'll let you know."

Margery waited until the last sound of the car had died in the distance, then went into the library, literally aglow with the light which came from within. One look at that radiant face was all Chandler needed. "Is it all right, dear?" he asked, softly.

"Yes," cried Margery, "it 's all right. Everything 's all right! Nothing can ever be wrong again!"

"I understand," he said, with a nod. "The things that are ours come to us and abide with us—they 're not to be taken away or lost. Listen—you 'll understand this now."

He picked up the book Miss Cynthia had sent him. It opened of its own accord, at one passage which he had underlined heavily: "Far above our heads, in the very centre of the sky, shines the star of our destined love; and it is in the atmosphere of that star and illumined by its rays, that every passion that stirs us will come to life, even to the end. And though we choose to right or to left of us, on the heights or in the shallows; though, in our

Miss Cynthia Comes

struggle to break through the enchanted circle that is drawn around all the acts of our life, we do violence to the instinct that moves us, and try our hardest to choose against the choice of destiny, yet shall the woman we elect always have come to us, straight from the unvarying star."

There was a silence, then Chandler asked, tenderly, "Do you understand?"

But Margery did not hear him. "Listen," she said. "He's coming back." She ran out to the gate and waited until Carter appeared. Blinded by the fact of his return, she did not notice Miss Cynthia at all, nor did the old lady stop to speak to her. Scorning assistance, she wriggled out of the back seat, and, with crutch and cane, went up the steps and straight through the open door into the library where the light was burning.

The white plumed hat upon her silvered hair was slightly askew, but the brilliants blazed both from her hair and from the buckle. Her purple velvet gown trailed sumptuously back from the folds of her white fur-lined coat, heavy with lace and silver. The Venetian lace bertha and the Egyptian spangled scarf rose and fell with every breath; upon her bare neck hung the locket, bordered by discoloured pearls, with the diamond cross putting the brilliants to shame. Her deep eyes met his, with longing and appeal.

After Many Years

Startled by the vision, Chandler wondered, for a moment, where he had seen that splendid coat before, then he remembered—Judith had worn it one night; she said it was Miss Cynthia's. Then he saw the locket.

Thrilled to the depths, yet secretly afraid to believe, and utterly forgetting his helplessness, he started from his chair, his empty arms outstretched.

"Oh, my dear," he said brokenly. "The many, many years!"

XXIII

"Gossip"

Exciting Enough

"FOLKS as wants to live in the city can if they like," said Aunt Belinda, pointedly. "It 's plenty enough excitin' for me right here."

"Jes' so, Mother—jes' so." Uncle Henry was nodding in a sunny corner of the kitchen porch, sniffing appreciatively, now and then, at the spicy scents that were wafted afar from the preserving kettle. "Is it termater pickles?"

"No—it 's peaches. And yellow tomato preserves with lemon peel in 'em."

"I 'd admire to taste the peaches, Mother, when you think they 're done. I ain't never seen your beat on pickles."

"They ain't done yet. They 've got to cook slow or they 'll bust." She came out, wiping her flushed face upon her apron, and settled down into the decrepit rocker that stood beside Uncle Henry's arm-chair.

"As I was sayin'," she resumed, "it 's plenty excitin' for me right here."

"So 't is, Mother—so 't is."

The One Concerned

"What with the marryin' and the givin' in marriage and the swappin' of partners goin' on almost at the last minute, a body 'd get flustered, if they let theirselves get to dwellin' on it."

"Then don't dwell on it, Mother."

"I ain't a dwellin'. I was just a thinkin'. I was wonderin' what his mother 'd say if she knew it."

"Whose mother?"

"His. What 'd she think of her son chasin' after one girl for three or four years and then gettin' engaged to her, and buildin' her a house, and gettin' the furniture most all into it, and then gettin' hisself engaged to another girl that he ain't never seen six months ago? What 'd you say?"

"I 'd say that as long as he was the one that was goin' to live with her, he had the most to say about it. I would n't let it concern me none."

"But it ain't honourable, Henry. I can't bear to have him do a thing like that. His own mother could n't have brung him up more carefully for the last five years than I have."

"He was brung up, Belinda, when he come here. You ain't had nothin' to do with it."

"I suppose not," she returned, sarcastically. "I ain't picked up after him and cooked for him and mended his clothes and put cream on his sunburn and fed his pets and aired his low-

necked coat to keep the moths out of it, have I ?"

"That ain't nothin', Mother. It 's only woman's work."

"Humph!" she snorted. "What have you done ?"

"Me ?" queried Uncle Henry, reminiscently. "Why I 've built the pigeon house——"

"He helped you do that."

"And the shed for the ottymobile——"

"He paid a carpenter to help you do that."

"And I made the road, so 's he would n't have to run over the grass——"

"That ain't nothin'—makin' roads ain't."

"No," the old man sighed, "mebbe not. Folks makes their own roads and we can't help 'em none. All we can do is to smooth the path a bit. I 've thought lots of times that if we all tried to make other people's paths easy, our own feet would have a smooth even place to walk on."

"You talk like a minister, Henry." She was not to be diverted by spiritual parallels from the main issue. "What I 'm sayin' is that it ain't decent for him to act so, and I don't know what to do about it."

"There ain't nothin' to be did, Belinda. You can't make Miss Judith marry him if she don't want to, and I reckon she don't. She could have."

"What do you think Miss Judith has done ?

Gifts

She's gone and given that handkerchief linen that she's spent months embroiderin', to that Margery, for a weddin' dress. She said it was made for his weddin', and she wanted the dress to be there. What do you think about that?"

"Who told you?"

"Miss Bancroft's Susie."

"Why n't she give it to Miss Bancroft?"

"I dunno. That 's what I 'd have done, if I had n't been goin' to use it myself."

"Where they all goin' to live afterwards?"

"Who—after what?"

"After all the marryin'."

Aunt Belinda sighed. "I dunno, Henry," she answered, with wifely patience. "If I did, I 'd tell you." She had the air of one unwillingly placed upon the witness stand.

"He 's give her the house." Uncle Henry reached over to the broom, selected a straw, and chewed it meditatively.

"Who 'd he give it to? Her or Margery?"

"Her."

"Henry Warner! How long have you knowed that?"

"Since day before yistiddy when I was to the store after the cinnamon and you sent me back to get the kind that comes in sticks."

"Who told you?"

"Si Walters. He was over to the court-house

The Sewing Circle Surprised

and he see the deed all recorded—Carter Keith to Judith Sylvester, for one dollar and other valuable considerations."

"Land sakes! She ain't doin' so bad then. She 's gettin' the house without the trouble of a husband. I reckon she 's smarter than I thought."

If the comment contained a hidden arrow, it glanced harmlessly aside from the armour of Uncle Henry's content. From his sunny corner he contemplated the rolling meadows that stretched from the road back to the hills. One of Carter's rabbits had escaped from its hutch and was hopping across the clover patch with an air of festivity. Pigeons promenaded back and forth in the sun, with deep-throated murmurs which seemed to indicate that it was a bright and beautiful morning and that all was well.

"The ladies at the Sewin' Circle was sayin' yesterday," she continued, "that after Miss Cynthia had waited as long as she had, she 'd orter have a husband that was n't lame. So I up and told 'em that Mr. Chandler and Miss Cynthia was made lame at the same time, and they was that surprised!"

"Don't take much to surprise a Sewin' Circle," the old man said, meditatively.

"P'raps not." Aunt Belinda clucked her teeth sharply together as she often did when she was annoyed. "I don't know why women

Gossip or Business

should n't talk about the things that interests 'em same as men do."

"Women gossips," replied Uncle Henry, severely. "Men does n't."

"What do you call gossipin', Henry Warner? Answer me that."

"Talkin' about things that don't matter. Tellin' things about people. Like Miss Bancroft's Susie tellin' you that Miss Judith had give her a dress. What 's that amount to? That 's gossip."

"And Si Walters tellin' you that he 'd give her the house and that he 'd seen the record of it, for 'one dollar and other valuable considerations'—and you settin' on a soap box all the afternoon to discuss it and forgettin' to bring the right cinnamon and havin' to be sent back for it—that ain't gossip, is it?"

"No, Belinda—'t ain't. That 's business."

"Is business transacted on soap boxes?"

"Might be," he returned, cautiously. He had the feeling that an unsuspected trap was about to close upon him. "Business is transacted wherever men happens to be—restaurants, stores, hotels, saloons, or any other place. Offices, too."

"Mis' Stebbins was sayin' at the Sewin' Circle that she reckoned about the first thing to be did after women got the vote would be to pass a law requirin' all saloons to be closed at

Women's Rights

five o'clock so 's the men could get home to their suppers in decent season."

"I ain't in favour of women's votin'."

"Why not?" Aunt Belinda bristled, for the modern unrest had penetrated the Sewing Circle.

"Well, they ain't got time. It 'd take 'em away from their home duties."

"It don't take no more time to vote than it does to go to market."

"That ain't what I 'm speakin' of. They 'd have to think about how they was goin' to vote and why. It 'd divert their minds."

"I dunno why they 'd have to think about it. Men does n't."

"Women orter be protected from the hardships of the world."

"Yes, they orter, but they ain't. As long as over half the world's work is slid onto women's shoulders, I don't see why they should n't have som'thin' to say about the runnin' of it."

"I 'm glad I ain't called on to settle it," he mused. "There ain't no use of gettin' yourself stirred up, Belinda. Smiles is pretty and pleasant but it takes fists to do things, and a vote orter have a fist behind it."

"Moral force—" she began.

"Is all right in lots of places, but it takes fists and clubs and guns to make a man's world straight. A mob, now—do you sup-

An Interesting Topic

pose a lady policeman could walk into a mob and smile and say, 'Gentlemen, will you please disperse yourselves and go to your separate homes'? A club is what's needed, or mebbe the fire hose."

"I could turn on the fire hose," returned Aunt Belinda, thoughtfully. "I 'd admire to do it."

"I reckon you would. If we 'd had a hose, I 'll reckon you 'd have turned it on me more 'n once when your temper got het up. That 's why I ain't never bought one."

"I would n't have turned no cold water on you, Henry. You 'd a took your death a cold. Sakes alive! The peaches are burnin'!"

She fled to the rescue, and Uncle Henry, unperturbed, selected another broom straw with extreme care. When she came out he reverted to the original topic.

"When 's he goin' to leave?"

"I dunno. He ain't said yet. He 's been packin' up his clothes and books and fishin' tackle and other traps, but he ain't talked none about movin' the furniture."

"I forgot," returned Uncle Henry, placidly chewing upon his straw. "He told me we was to keep the furniture in remembrance of him, and, 'I hope, Uncle Henry,' he says, 'that you 'n Aunt Belinda will see your way clear to take some other lonely young fellow into your hearts and home, and be father 'n mother

to him, same 's you 've been to me.' Them 's his very words."

"Henry Warner! When 'd he tell you that?"

"I dunno as I could say just when. Last week sometime, I reckon. I disremember."

"Well if you ain't the beatenest! I never in all my life—" Aunt Belinda's lower jaw dropped, but words mercifully failed. "It 's a wonder you would n't tell me somethin' now and then," she concluded, sarcastically.

"I do, Belinda—I do. What 's right and proper for you to know I tell you in due season and what ain't, I don't. I never was one to gossip."

"I don't know of anythin' you 've ever kept to yourself. I ain't complainin' that you don't tell me everythin'—I 'm complainin' that you don't do it quick enough."

"A man is obliged to have a reservoir for his mind. He can't let everythin' trickle out the minute it gets in, like a woman does."

"Reservoir!" she repeated, scornfully. "You 'd better say cistern—with the cover off, too, and mosquitoes hatchin' on top."

"You remind me some of a pepper box, Belinda. If you 'll bring me the corn, I 'll feed the pigeons. It must be about time. And if you 'll bring out a pail of water when you come, too, I 'll go and fill the tile so 's they can drink. It 's got low and one of 'em a'most fell into it just now."

Time to Eat

A cloud of feathered pensioners descended into the yard as the first handful of corn struck the bare earth. Aunt Belinda stood watching, but Uncle Henry, as was his wont, sat whenever it was possible to sit. He had theories about "making his mind save his feet," and was occasionally reminded, with a certain tartness, that he never used his mind for any other purpose.

"I wonder," he was saying, "how they know what time it is?"

"By their stomachs, I reckon, same's a man does."

"What are you layin' out to have for dinner, Mother?"

"There ain't goin' to be no dinner till after the peaches and tomatoes is put up. I'll get you a snack of bread and cheese, if you'd like it. You can set out here and eat it."

"All right. Mebbe I could eat one or two of them cold sassages, too. And I'd like one of them peaches, no matter whether it's cooked or not. Raw peaches is good."

"But raw pickles ain't. You shan't have none till they're good and done, so you can just make up your mind to wait."

"All right." He had the pathetic submissiveness of the married man in his tone. "I was wonderin' whether as long as he's give us the furniture, he would n't let us keep the rabbits

The Mud Turtle

and pigeons and dogs. I 'd admire to have 'em—they remind me of him so."

"That 's for you and him to settle, Father. If I was a man and was just goin' to be married I don't know what I 'd want of a menagerie."

"Do you remember the time he went huntin' and brought home that little wildcat to tame ?"

"I ain't likely to forget it. And the mud turtle that was for ever climbin' out of its pan and walkin' around where it could get stepped on ?"

"I remember. Miss Judith told him he ought to name the turtle Maud because it insisted on goin' into the garden and he said he was goin' to call it Napoleon on account of the bony part."

"I suppose there was some joke in that. I can remember yet how they was laughin'."

"So can I, but there need n't have been no joke. Folks in love is terrible easy to please."

"If they was n't, they would n't be in love, I reckon."

"Mebbe not." Uncle Henry munched peacefully at his bread and cheese, and threw an occasional bit to the pigeons. He shared his cold sausage with one of the collies, and Aunt Belinda set out a panful of scraps for the remainder of the kennel, which arrived im-

How Did It Happen

mediately, with a unanimous and unmistakable request.

"I was just thinkin' about Miss Cynthia," he continued, settling back comfortably in his chair. "Ain't it funny that she 'n Chandler should have been in the same wreck and livin' here these twenty years and more and never layin' eyes on each other, and now they 're goin' to be married. It beats all!"

"That was where they got acquainted—in the wreck. If either of 'em had ever went anywhere, they 'd have seen each other, but they 've both stayed close to home."

"They could have went, if they was a mind to," he suggested.

"I suppose they could. Miss Cynthia got up there quick enough when she was once in the notion. But how 'd they know they was the ones that was wrecked together ?"

"How 'd it come that they knowed it now ? Why ain't they just stayed here and never seen each other till they was both dead ?"

"On account of them both havin' kept their mouths shut and neither of 'em bein' given to gossip. Just by chance, they each tells Miss Judith, I understand, and she goes right ahead and fixes things up. Men muddles things and women straightens 'em out."

"If men is muddlers, women is meddlers. Ain't it so, Belinda ?" Uncle Henry laughed

heartily at his own joke, but nobody else appeared to notice it.

"He was tellin' me yesterday," the old man continued, after a pause, "that he had a couple of friends in mind that he thought would like to come here and stay with us. One of 'em is a lawyer, same as he is, and the other works in a bank. Must be nice to work in a bank—shuttin' up shop at three o'clock and at noon on Saturdays, all the year round."

"Henry Warner! Why did n't you tell me that yesterday!"

"I ain't given to gossip, Belinda. Besides, there ain't no hurry, is there? He said he 'd bring 'em both out to supper to-night and let 'em see how they liked the place. The bankin' feller has been driv' almost crazy by too much arithmetic and the doctor told him he must have quiet."

"Henry Warner, you 're enough to try the patience of a saint! Here you 've knowed since yesterday that there was goin' to be company for supper and you ain't never said a word to me about it! What am I goin' to do, I 'd like to know?" Tears of vexation rolled down her wrinkled cheeks.

"There, there, Belinda," comforted Uncle Henry. "What 's good enough for him and me is good enough for anybody else, ain't it?"

"I ain't sayin' it is n't," she snapped. "But what 'll feed three ain't goin' to make five

Aunt Belinda Relents

comfortable. And if the two that 's comin' has got appetites anythin' like yours and his, it 'll mean cookin' from now till train time to get enough to fill 'em up. You go and hitch up, and I 'll write out what I want at the store."

A pained expression came upon the old man's face. "But my dinner, Belinda!"

"Your dinner, Henry Warner, is your supper. There 's another cold sassage in the pantry and you can munch on it whiles you 're drivin' in."

"But——"

"Don't stop to talk. Go and hitch up, and see that you come right back. Promise me you won't set down until you come home."

Weakly, he promised. "Must have done somethin' terrible," he said to himself, as he went toward the barn, "or Belinda 'd never make me go to town without my dinner. She knows I 'm likely to get sick if I don't have my meals regular. Women is queer—even the best of 'em—they certainly is."

Late in the afternoon Aunt Belinda relented. She had her kitchen table heavily laden with jar after jar of preserves and pickles. A pleasant, spicy odour pervaded the spotless house, the table was set with the best china and silver, and a feast, which included hot biscuits and honey, was well under way. Aunt Belinda herself had donned her second-

best black silk, and had on a new white apron. She appeared before the dejected one with a tray laden with sandwiches and warm little cakes, fresh from the oven, and a teapot steaming in the centre.

He ate gratefully, and, of his own accord, took the ravaged tray into the house.

"I reckoned you 'd find it comfortin'," she said, pacifically.

"It was, Mother. You 've been givin' me comfort ever since I 've knowed you."

"And you me,—that is, most of the time." Aunt Belinda was trying to be truthful and at the same time polite.

The post-prandial contentment had Uncle Henry firmly in its grasp. "I don't see as you 've changed none, Mother. You look just about the same to me as you did thirty years ago when we was married—only prettier."

A faded pink blossomed upon Aunt Belinda's wrinkled cheeks, and her keen eyes softened. The old man leaned forward, out of his chair.

"Mother! If we wa' n't married and I was to ask you, would you come now, like Miss Cynthia and Chandler ?"

"I reckon I would."

He got up, went to her, and bent down to kiss her. "Thirty years!" he said. "It

Never Old

don't seem as if we was old, Mother, does it ?"

"No, Henry, it does n't. And we ain't, neither. Love never gets old!"

XXIV

The Sunset Hour

Apart and Alone

AFTER the first time, Miss Cynthia steadfastly refused to go to Chandler's house again, but insisted that he should come to her, as was right and proper. Judith went to the city and selected a wheeled chair for him that could be used upon the street. The day it came, he went out of his little yard for the first time in twenty-five years.

Apart, and more alone than ever, Judith watched the two, so strangely brought together after many years. Forgetting the silver that shone fitfully in Chandler's hair and made a crown of glory upon Miss Cynthia's beautiful head, they had magically become young again. With a queer little pain at her heart, Judith comprehended Miss Cynthia's intervals of absent-mindedness, when the wonderful eyes, softened with dreams and tears, looked at things they saw not, searching the far beyond for things they could not see.

The situation had become reversed. Once Miss Cynthia, lonely, though unselfish, had

Joy and Beauty

sat apart and communed with herself while the lovers were unconscious even of her remote existence. Now Judith spent solitary evenings in the upper room, with only the fire for companionship, while the other two, downstairs, sat close together, with clasped hands bridging the empty and desolate years.

Just as Judith had waited for Carter upon the upper balcony, Miss Cynthia sat there now, straining her eyes for the first glimpse of the wheeled chair. Chandler always came to dinner and even though the afternoon was cold, Miss Cynthia, in her white and silver coat, bade brave defiance to all Judith's warnings and watched for her lover, as was her woman's right.

More beautiful than ever, Miss Cynthia literally radiated joy. Roses bloomed upon her cheeks again, as they had in years gone by; her sweet voice, once high and clear, was filled with deep undertones of tenderness. The music of it thrilled Judith to the heart; it was so full of longing and appeal.

Practical considerations appeared before Judith, but did not disturb Miss Cynthia at all. For instance, where were they to live? Chandler's house was small and inappropriate, and Miss Cynthia's double-decked mansion was hardly the place for a man who left his wheeled chair only to be lifted into bed.

Radiant as a Saint

Judith pondered through many a wakeful hour before the inspiration came to her.

But would Aunt Cynthia go? The little old lady was extraordinarily self-willed. Would Chandler accept it? And yet, why not? Judith waited, fearing to speak.

The golden afternoon was waning. Long purple shadows lay upon the valley, while the last light lingered upon the hills. Flaming tapestries of sunset hung from the high walls of heaven, at once a death and a promise of resurrection. Miss Cynthia, closely wrapped in her splendour, sat facing it. She reminded Judith of a saint upon a stained glass window, so radiant was she from the sunset and from the light within.

"Dear," said Judith, softly, "you 'll have to have a wedding-gown."

"Why?" asked Miss Cynthia, dreamily. Her eyes were fixed upon the road below.

"Everybody does," Judith answered, with a little laugh.

"I 'm not everybody," the old lady murmured.

"No, but you can't be married as though you were n't anybody. Will you let me go to town to-morrow and get you a wedding-gown —white satin and lace veil and orange blossoms and everything else that goes with it?"

"I don't know what you 're talking about, Judith," the disturbed one remarked, fretfully.

The Place, the Time, and the Gown

"Why should you prattle about white satin on a day like this? Do you see that wonderful sunset? Is n't it the most perfect day God ever made? And he 's coming—he 'll be here inside of half an hour."

"For that half-hour you must be sensible," said Judith, with affected sternness. She went to the little white and silver figure, lifted the saucy chin, and kissed the sweet lips. "Would you mind telling me, dear, as woman to woman, what you intend to be married in?"

"My purple velvet," said Miss Cynthia, promptly.

"Dearest! It 's impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible in this world of miracles, my dear. We speak as though the days of magic were over, but they 're not."

"Aunt Cynthia! Your purple velvet is low-necked, is n't it?"

"Somewhat. Do you consider it indecent?"

"For daytime wear, yes. Unless you 're going to be married in the evening, you can't wear it."

"I will if I want to. I 'm going to be married in church, as near sunset as possible, and I 'm going to wear my purple velvet."

"Why church?" queried Judith. "Why sunset? Why the velvet gown?"

Miss Cynthia turned to Judith with the air of a teacher about to turn a fountain of wis-

A Wedding-Present

dom upon the parching minds of an eager class. "Church? Because marriage is a religious ceremony and religion belongs to church. Indeed, most people keep theirs there exclusively. Sunset because we 're both in our declining years—morning and high noon are not for people of fifty, are they? Besides—it 's like that"—pointing to the splendour in the west—"the wonder and the glory at the close of a long, dull day. This is my hour. And the purple velvet because it belongs with the sunset—and with me—and because I wore it—the night—that—that—" She hesitated and dimpled in lovely confusion. "Because I look like a Real Lady in it, don't I?" she concluded, with airy defiance.

"Oh, you darling," said Judith, half to herself. "Forgive me. You shall have all the purple velvet you want. I 'll have the church upholstered with it if you say so."

"Not at all," said Miss Cynthia, disclaiming the offer with a wave of her hand. "I 'm a simple and modest person with quiet tastes. What are you going to give me for a wedding present?" she inquired, with childlike interest.

Judith knelt beside the old lady's low chair. "Have n't you guessed? Have n't you thought of the one thing I have to give you? The one thing that you ought to have?"

"No," murmured Miss Cynthia. "I

The Dear Little House

have n't." She stood up for a moment, shading her eyes, but there were no signs of the approaching chair, so she settled back again.

"Where were you going to live, dear?"

"I don't know. Any place. Both places. Under a red umbrella on the river bank. It does n't matter."

"But it does. Guess, dearest."

"I can't. Don't torment me by making me use my mind when I don't want to."

"The House of Hearts," said Judith, softly.

Miss Cynthia turned, startled. "No," she said. "You must n't."

"But I must. It 's mine, is n't it? Besides, I 've already deeded it to you, and you can't say a single word." She stopped the flood of protestations with a kiss.

Miss Cynthia's eyes filled. "The dear little house," she said, half to herself. "All for me —and for him!"

"Yes," said Judith, choking back her own tears. "Built for a bride, and to be given to the loveliest bride that ever was, as a wedding-gift from someone who loves her very, very much."

"Judith!" Miss Cynthia lifted her arms and the two wept together, as is the way of women when they are very, very happy. "I can't believe it," sobbed Miss Cynthia. "What a long, awful day I 've had, and what a wonderful sunset I 'm having now! Judith!

Perfectly Suitable

Do you think it 's wrong for anybody to be so happy as I am ?"

"No, dear—it 's perfectly right. Look!" She pointed to the road below. "You must n't let him find you crying."

"No," said Miss Cynthia, rising and hurriedly wiping her eyes. "I must n't." She went down and was waiting for him at the door when the chair turned in at the gate.

Judith walked back and forth slowly upon the veranda, glad she had given as she had. Carter would be glad, too, when he knew—she must write him a note and tell him. She had heard, through Chandler and Miss Cynthia, of the engagement, and also that Margery had chosen to live in town where so much was going on all the time that one could never be dull.

If the house had been built for Miss Cynthia and Chandler, it could not have been more suitable in every way—the low bungalow, with only four or five steps to the porch and no stairs at all inside. She decided upon additional bookcases for the living-room and den; otherwise she would finish it as she had meant to do long ago, and the few last touches should be those she had planned for herself, even to the pink-and-white chintz in one dressing-room and the blue-and-white in the other.

The name of the house was right, too, and the stationery, for which the die had been

Happiness at Last

made months previously, and the garden, to be abloom with roses wherever roses could be made to grow. Strangely, also, the verses belonged to Miss Cynthia and Chandler, who had come to their joy so late:

"Little sunset House of Hearts·
Standing all alone,
I could come and sweep the leaves
From your stepping stone.

. . . . . .

"I and he could light your fires,
Laughing at the rain,
But oh, it's far to Happiness—
A short way back again."

It had been far to happiness, for Miss Cynthia and Chandler, but, because they had waited, it had come at last, with no shadows to divide or deny them and no barriers to lie between.

"I 'll wait, too," said Judith to herself. "If it 's meant for me, it will come, and if it is n't, I don't want it."

That night, after dinner, when the fire was blazing in the fireplace in the downstairs living-room, when Chandler's attendant was making merry in the kitchen with Miss Cynthia's household staff, out of sight, yet within call, when Judith with the plea of an interesting book, had betaken herself to her lonely hearthstone upstairs, Miss Cynthia pushed

a little footstool close to Chandler's chair, and knelt upon it, leaning against him.

In the little broken phrases, she told him what Judith had done. She was stirred to the depths by the pity of it—Judith's own joy had so gone astray. The man said nothing; he only stroked his old sweetheart's silver hair.

"Is n't it wonderful?" she asked.

"No," the deep voice answered, "nothing is wonderful but this."

"But it 's part of this, is n't it, Martin?"

"Surely, dear. Everything is, is n't it? Is there anything in the whole wide world that does n't belong to this?"

"Yes—pain and sorrow and waiting and hungry hearts; those don't belong."

"We 've had those, dearest. Have you forgotten?"

"I 've forgotten everything," sighed Miss Cynthia. "That unspeakable horror, and that one dear hour together in the midst of it, and then the long waiting, then this—it 's as if we 'd died in the wreck, is n't it, and had gone straight on to heaven? Do you think heaven can be any more than this—or different?"

"No. If God Himself is Love, what else can heaven be, save immortality—with no fear of parting?"

Miss Cynthia leaned closer. "There is n't much time left for us to be together, Martin.

Always Together

We 've come to sunset now, and the night must be very near us. Have you thought of that ?"

"Yes, I 've thought of it, but this is n't all —it can't be. Our mortal life is only the flaming arc of a circle—as someone has said, 'the rainbow between two silences.' The rest of the circle is wrapped in shadow, so we cannot see or even guess what lies beyond, but the arc implies the circle, just as night means day, if you look far enough into it."

"Yes, but sometimes, when I think of all we might have had——"

"Hush, sweetheart. You must never think of that—nor must I. The things that are meant for us come to us when we are meant to have them. Dawn and high noon and the long days of struggle may be for the others, but sunset is for us, and twilight."

"And night too, Martin—the long night out upon the circle, when the arc merges into it."

"Yes, dear."

"Together ?"

"Always together, darling—never to be parted any more." He leaned forward, and lifted her up into his arms, as though she were a child; he kissed the full soft throat, the silvered hair, the dimpled hands, the wonderful, dreamy eyes, and then the sweet lips, answering him with the rapture that follows long denial.

The Double Wedding

"Always together," she murmured, again, and the man's deep voice echoed: "Always!"

Carter's normal masculine conceit was somewhat injured by the fact that Judith had suggested a double wedding in the church when she found that Margery and Miss Cynthia had chanced to choose the same wedding-day. Judith made all the plans for it, directed the decoration of the church, and ordered a wedding-feast to be served at Miss Cynthia's with two cakes, one for each bride.

Not forgetting Miss Cynthia's favourite poison-ivy, but taking care to handle it with gloves, Judith had filled the church with autumn leaves—great boughs of gold and crimson, mingled with the russet of the oaks, and trailing vines of gold and scarlet everywhere. The sunset streamed through the stained glass windows, carrying the colour of Autumn into every nook and corner. The fragrance of it floated in through the open door, to the murmur of drifted leaves. Upon the altar the yellow taper-lights gleamed like fallen stars.

Mr. and Mrs. Warner, with Judith and the minister's wife, sat in the front pews. Carter and Margery were married first—Margery in the white linen gown Judith had embroidered for her own wedding—pale but lovely, with the particular loveliness that belongs to brides.

The Wedding-Feast

Then Miss Cynthia, in her purple velvet gown and white hat, went up to the altar, beside Chandler's chair, and knelt while the brief service was said. It had not been planned, but Judith instinctively followed Miss Cynthia when she went, and held her hand all through the ceremony—bridesmaid at the wedding that was to have been her own.

Judith went back with Chandler, walking beside him. Mr. and Mrs. Warner and the minister and his wife followed them. The others went in Carter's automobile.

The feast was meant to be gay, but it was not—wedding-feasts seldom are, and everyone was relieved when it was over. The minister and his wife disappeared, then the Warners followed, Uncle Henry's joy at departure being painfully evident, as he was not a "visitin' man." The bride in purple velvet went to her new home in the car, to be waiting at the door when her husband came, with his attendant. Neither of them had seen the house.

Margery and Judith were left alone, until the car should come to take Margery back to Chandler's, while she changed her wedding-gown for her street costume she was to wear into town.

Margery spoke first. "Oh Judith," she said, with a laugh that was half a sob, "I 'm so happy!"

Saying Good-Bye

"Are you?" queried the older woman, with a beautiful, serene smile. "I 'm glad. I hope you always will be—I 'm sure you will be."

"Judith," said Margery, with youth's unconscious cruelty, "don't you care? I mean —you could n't have cared, could you?"

"No," said Judith, calmly, "I could n't have cared." The old pain stabbed at her heart for a moment, then went away, to return, as she guessed, more than once, in the lonely days that lay ahead.

"I 'll say good-bye now, if you don't mind," she went on. "I 've been driven mad by a headache almost all day. I 'll see you both often, later on."

"Yes," Margery said, lifting her face to be kissed, "you must come to us often. Good-bye." The car was already humming and purring along the river road, so Margery went out to meet it, and Judith went upstairs, glad to be alone at last.

From the safe shelter of Aunt Cynthia's room, she saw Carter assist his bride into the car, and guessed, by the quick glance he sent to the upper windows, that Margery had passed on her excuse. "I ought to have waited," said Judith, to herself. "I could have been decent for fifteen minutes more, I guess—if I 'd tried."

From below came the mournful clatter of dishes,—saddest sound on earth to those who

Beyond All Chance of Change

dread the inevitable washing. Judith looked at her own white hands, smooth and beautifully kept. "I 'm spared that," she thought. "I—I 've been spared lots of things."

Because it was her home—and the only one she had—Judith had chosen to stay on alone in the old house, for a time at least. It seemed singularly desolate without Aunt Cynthia, but Judith told herself, sternly, that she was a grown woman, not a child, and that she must n't let herself be lonely. Why, she had everything—except the one thing she wanted.

Forcing back the tears, she went out upon the balcony. In pride of purple and pomp of gold, the day and the Summer were dying together.

The thousand miles of splendour stretched away to the sea; valleys full of silver mists, hills veiled by amethystine haze; a sunset, lain down upon the earth, to dream awhile—and then to sleep.

"I wonder if it 's sunset for me, too," she thought. "Or is there another day to come ?"

Something Chandler had told her once came back to her. Nobody could take away from her the things she had had—they were hers securely, beyond all chance of change. And the things that were truly hers should come to her and abide with her for ever—not to be destroyed or taken away or lost.

And so, she must be content. She must

What Lay before Her

learn to wait, and keep on dreaming. Upon her loom of life she had worked out a single episode, but it was not yet far enough out of the loom so that she could understand—or even see—the design.

To be a weaver of dreams—to put the golden thread into the warp and woof of the fabric, to make the best, steadily, of what little she might have, to sink self in service, and to find the wonderful way of life as it is written in terms of self-abandonment—this lay before her now.

And with the golden thread to make a literal cloth of gold—to transfigure even a gloomy fabric by the magic of dreams; to spread this tapestry everywhere within her House of Life—to seek steadily for joy until she deserved it, even commanded it—then, mysteriously, from the far corners of the earth, it would come, as Chandler had said, and as his own life had proved.

Slowly the glory died. On flame-bright hills the last light still lingered, but sadly, as though it was never to come again. A cold wind came from the east, where light was born. Judith shivered a little, but still stood there, thinking.

The afterglow shone behind the trees, but faintly. In the midst of it was the pale gold crescent of the Autumn moon. A star or two came out—the advance guard of that celestial

On the Paths of Peace

army which was to set the heavens ablaze with javelins of silver light.

Fallen leaves murmured, sending subtle fragrance afar into the dusk as they drifted across the road. A belated squirrel scampered madly across the garden on his way to his home in a hollow tree, stirring a cricket to shrill pipings of resentment, which presently ceased.

"To-night might have been so different," thought Judith, "if—if it had been meant to be." Already her feet were firmly set upon the paths of peace. "The things that are mine I shall have," she went on, to herself, "so I 'll wait—and dream—till they come."

Smiling, serene, and fully content, she turned and went in—alone.

THE END

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